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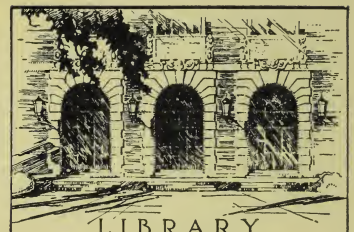

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WOMAN'S FOLLY

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Edited by EDMUND GOSSE.

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WOMAN'S FOLLY

BY

GEMMA FERRUGGIA

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN

BY HELEN ZIMMERN

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1895

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INTRODUCTION

It is scarcely two years since Gemma Ferruggia, the author of this novel, suddenly sprang into fame by the publication of *Follie Muliebri*, which we here present to English readers under the title of *Woman's Folly*.* She had already published several novels, *Verso il nulla*, *L'Idea*, *L'Enigma Soave*, but these had attracted no particular notice. *Follie Muliebri*, on the other hand, produced an extraordinary sensation, and has been more widely read than perhaps any other specimen of recent Italian fiction. Of the circumstances of Gemma Ferruggia's life I know nothing, but it is clear from her writings that she is familiar with country life in the northern part of Italy. *Follie Muliebri* was published at Milan in the summer of 1893.

It is sometimes alleged that I am too partial to

* The exact translation of these words would be "Feminine Mad Tricks" or "Extravagances." Miss Helen Zimmern must not be held responsible for the more convenient English equivalent, or be supposed to have taken plural words for singular.

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the novels which appear in this series of translations, and claim for them a recognition in excess of their merits. I shall certainly not err by any such praise of *Woman's Folly*, nor take upon myself the dangerous task of pronouncing approval of it. It emanates from a class of which England has lately produced some striking and popular examples, the class of the emancipated New Woman. All I claim for it is that, in this class, it takes a foremost place. It leaves "George Egerton" and Madam Sarah Grand panting far behind. The New Woman has not, I think, in any country, expressed herself with more daring, and I think she never will. After such a revelation of the sex, reaction must follow, since the limits of iconoclasm have been reached. The graven image called Man lies at the feet of Gemma Ferruggia, and she has ground him to dust.

It would be presumptuous for a mere man to comment on the ethics of a book which, like *Woman's Folly*, is hedged about with femininity. This novel is written by a lady, is dedicated by name to a well-known Italian lady, who seems in some occult way to have commanded its composition ; it has been read with rapture by thousands of Italian women, and an Englishwoman of letters has translated it with enthusiasm. For a man to criti-

cise *Woman's Folly* would be to intrude into the mysteries of Ceres or push uninvited into the Pioneer Club. To such a critic the authoress would scornfully reply, in the words of her heroine, "*Io contemplava me, all' infuori de me.*" ("I am creating out of my own heart types of womanhood, and Woman has freed herself from the insulting bondage of male supervision.") That is, of course, what makes *Woman's Folly* interesting, if interesting it is found.

Yet the modest male may, without offence, draw attention to the curious features of the masterpiece revealed to him. He finds himself finally routed and pulverised by Gemma Ferruggia. Her weaker Northern sisters have acknowledged possibilities of virtue, if not of usefulness, in man. They have so far paltered with their consciences as to admit that some very old men, now and then a clergyman, very rarely an unsuccessful artist, occasionally a male of the lower classes, may be not entirely vile. But to the uplifted sensibilities of Gemma Ferruggia, Man is wholly the accursed thing. In youth and in age, in poverty and in wealth, handsome or ugly, clever or stupid, the male is inevitably sordid, sensual, treasonable, weak and criminal; he touches Woman but to tyrannise over or to defile her. He

no longer takes the *rôle* of Adam, but of the Serpent. If Woman errs, becomes hysterical and degraded, loses her self-respect, it is the fault of Man. She would be of an Arcadian sweetness were it not for him, and his is in her veins the inherited poison which destroys her.

This is a very curious theory, and one developed within the last few years. It has fed on the honey-dew of Lombroso and Max Nordau, and has drunk the milk of Hereditary Degeneration. A very quaint feature about it is that it repeats, with a change of sex, exactly what was said in the early Middle Ages by the priests. Then Woman was the accursed thing, from whom all the woes and disgrace of Man proceeded; then female eyes played the basilisk and female tyrannies ate into the heart of the race. The sterile theory is now reversed, and Man enjoys the obloquy which he once cast on Woman. Woman, herself, as reflected in the imagination of Gemma Ferruggia, has lost her pastoral bloom, and has attached to herself some very ugly qualities, but that, no doubt, is owing to her long juxta-position with the damning sex.

No one, I think, and not even a male reader, will deny that Gemma Ferruggia wields a powerful pen, or that she has a command of passion. Her

novel is a study of three types of womanhood, each of whom, in her peculiar way, loses the guerdon of life by the excess of her own qualities. The epigraph of *Follie Muliebri* might be Christina Rossetti's splendid sonnet, "A Triad":

"Three sang of love together; one with lips
Crimson, with cheeks and bosom in a glow,
Flushed to the yellow hair and finger-tips;
And one there sang who soft and smooth as snow
Bloomed like a tinted hyacinth at a show;
And one was blue with famine after love,
Who, like a harpstring snapped, rang harsh and low
The burden of what those were singing of.
One shamed herself in love; one temperately
Grew gross in soulless love, a sluggish wife;
One famished died for love; thus two of three
Took death for love and won him after strife;
One droned in sweetness like a fattened bee:
All on the threshold, yet all short of life."

EDMUND GOSSE.

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PART I

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PART I

TYPES

You are good : I want you also to be great.

It is not your science that has saved me, Doctor, but your goodness ; your noble and eloquent words, your liberal-minded actions ; your glances kindled by enthusiasm for all that is pure and true, the atmosphere of convincing honesty that surrounds you—for you are impassioned and entrancing, like almost all who are Utopians by conviction !

Mistrust your great Utopia, my friend ; it bears the semblance of truth, and is called *science*.

I, Caterina Soave, the sad and silent woman you have saved, did not hesitate in the conception of crime, felt no terror at the moment of the act, and did not tremble for fear of punishment ; after the deed no quiver ran through me when I embraced my little son, I felt no agitation at the meeting with my sister Lorenza, the miserable creature my deed has irrevocably condemned, nor was I disturbed by the tragic speech of my other sister, Luisa, that rebellious daughter who now seems consumed by remorse.

What unnerved me was the terrible irony of your belief in me.

I kept silence, faithful to my convictions, strong in my sense of justice ; I persistently refused to speak before those who accused me, cursed me, and threatened me. I was not alarmed, I did not care; I knew already that the counsel for the prosecution, with his imperfect general knowledge, knew better than you ; but I did not weep because of what I heard, I wept for astonishment and compassion momentarily influenced by the sublimity of your unconsciousness.

You alone, therefore, deserve to *know*.

Do you remember? First came Luisa ; she spoke at length, impressing the public by the clearness of her evidence. I listened, and looked at her tranquilly, knowing well that those deep, tragic eyes of hers dare not fix themselves on me, for my sister Luisa lied, lied to save me. Then came Lorenza, the dreamer. Possibly, in her holy but misguided affection for me, the poor girl thought she was doing her duty to me in telling such a mass of untruths ; I followed the convulsive movements of her pallid lips, contaminated by these falsehoods, I noticed the pitiful trembling of her slender form, and the burden of her sacrifice in her sorrowful eyes ; in every word, in every little action of her thin and nervous hands, I could read the sacrifice she was making.

If I had said to her, "You lie! Remember God!" the girl would have stopped instantly, and, burning with the truth, would instantly have betrayed herself.

Many times, in horror at the deception, I was

on the point of interrupting Luisa, or of imposing silence on Lorenza. During the whole, interminable trial I felt no anxiety for my own safety; I was a calm and attentive spectator, full of curiosity, keen of observation, genuine in my surprise.

I contemplated myself, outside of myself, as it were another person. This was nothing new for me; I had always listened to myself and studied myself; always, in every circumstance of my life, I had foreseen events, waiting for them with a conviction of their inevitableness, feeling this double life even to the extent of being irritated against myself, as though another personality were opposed to mine, forcing me to an active vigilance hateful in its resistance, hateful in its futility. Perhaps you think strife ensued; on the contrary, there was never any strife, I felt and still feel myself exist in perfect accord of fatalism and conscience.

I wish you to know all—you, who described me as a gloomy and hysterical creature, moved by an irresistible power, impelled by a burst of sensual jealousy. . . . . I?

And why did you believe the evidence of those who saved me so unjustly? You believed the words of Luisa, cynical and resolute in her good intentions; you believed Lorenza, sinful despite her holy purpose, you believed the poetic inventions of Gustavo Mariani, Lorenza's unstable lover, and the clumsy falsehoods of my brother-in-law Antonio.

I will confess to you: I hate all those people who lied for me.

What did my sisters say?

"Caterina has always suffered from fearful convulsions: when quite a child she would fling herself on the ground for a mere nothing, foam at the mouth, bite her hands, a prey to violent attacks of unreasoning anger."

It is not true, it is not true. Caterina Soave is a creature without nerves, a vigorous creature who has never been ill, never. I like all that is healthy, strong, and firm. When I was quite young I went with my father to visit our farms; I stayed for hours and hours in the sun, I took part in the peasants' work, the most laborious occupations were those that attracted me most; I had always a horror of meditation, a horror of a contemplative life; even now, when I find Lorenza on her knees, lost in prayer, fainting before the crucifix, I am filled with a sense of disgust that overcomes all feelings of compassion.

Those fits of weeping, so common to women, are unknown to me; I did not weep at the death of my father, I did not sob beside my mother's corpse, for all that is brought about by natural laws inspires me with with deep respect, almost a holy respect. I loved my parents calmly, and I obeyed them also; my sister Luisa, who fled from her home to marry a common man, filled me with scorn and contempt, but not with anger.

Anger is an ignoble sentiment; it is worse, it is a useless sentiment—Caterina Soave has a horror of everything that is useless.

What did Gustavo Mariani say?

"The accused, who is of a sensitive nature and

easily excited, has a most extraordinary hatred for music ; often, at night, I have met her wandering about the country, or standing motionless in the moonlit fields ; she is fond of taking long rides on horseback, from which she returns with scarlet cheeks and flashing eyes—a prey to a sort of nervous fever. . . . . "

The fool! It is quite true that I prefer the harmony of nature to the false notes of man's exaggerated imagination ; I mean the silent music, joyful or sad, that is in all things unchangeable ; it is very true that, weary of the sound of the human voice, weary of the tyranny of the presence of thinking beings, of persons who change their loves, their localities, their ideas, I would visit the things that are faithful to one place, the stones in the torrent that never tire of the wild water that kisses them as it rushes past, the turbulent stream that never tires of kissing, the grass that faithfully returns, springing up afresh year by year. And it is true, too, that I returned cheerful, not excited, from those long rides ; the wind roughened my face and quickened my blood, and put new vigour into me ; the sight of the country, where eye and soul made such vast and marvellous discoveries, reconciled me to life. But how could they understand, those people, what they chose to call the irresponsibility of my crime ?

"The father of the prisoner," said my brother-in-law Antonio, "was of an authoritative character —a sort of czar—who ill-treated his labourers, and was inexorable in the matter of punishment.

A sister of Caterina's mother was an epileptic subject, who became furious at the smell of certain scents and the sight of certain colours."

Thus the wretch revenged himself on the dead. My poor father, who believed, like me, in a great human hierarchy! And poor mother, so faithful to the memory of Aunt Beatrice! Perhaps that is why I loved all strongly scented flowers! Perhaps that is why I have never worn light-coloured dresses?

No, Doctor, no. It was for no reasons of heredity that I killed my husband.

Now listen. From the time when you saved me, two years ago, I set myself to overcome my dislike to reading; that dislike was so intense that, until I was thirty years old, I remained profoundly ignorant, but in the last two years I have eagerly read everything that has been produced in that new species of literature which may be called the apotheosis of crime; all the horrors committed by murderers, studied in cold blood, and described anatomically, made no impression on me, but left me calm and unconvinced. I studied books of science, which seemed to me like romances; I studied works of romance which seemed as useless as those of science; the former appeared to me most imperfect, the latter appeared paradoxical in their sentiments, and ironical and ridiculous in what was supposed to represent the positive view.

I read Lombroso; I read "La Fille Elisa" by Goncourt, and "Giovanni Episcopo" and "L'In-

nocente" by Gabriele D'Annunzio; also many Russian books, great and impressive as the steppes; the dull romances of English literature, and the coarse French romances which seem schools for thieves and criminals, preaching revolt, the knife, and the ambuscade. From all these half-fearful, half-fascinating studies of crime I drew one blunt and frank conclusion—none know themselves, the history of crime does not exist, all are themselves criminals. There!

Ah, c'est que je ne suis pas une fille! (I write this in French, for the bluntness of the corresponding Italian expression disgusts and offends me.) No; je ne suis pas une fille comme Elisa, cette femme perdue . . . . epileptic and sinful, half through surprise at herself! In my family there exist no strange laws of criminal heredity; neither does there exist any single point of sympathy between me and those who obey the ignoble instincts of sensual jealousy, for I never loved my husband, nor felt myself drawn towards him through any one of the senses. I remained faithful to him, and that is sufficient; and just so he should have remained faithful to me.

Doctor, you will have to condemn me, in accordance with all human laws, and that because I committed murder, being fully conscious of my deed.

Science will gain nothing from my story—and even if it did, do you believe that one single crime could influence in any way the history of the future? Of what use is it to *know* if one can-

not escape the *inevitable*, nor cure the *irremediable?*

I am going to tell my story to you, out of respect for your honesty, which has been deceived by false ideas—but to no one else. Know, then, that for the last seven years I have felt the approach of the inevitable moment when I should be *forced* to kill Lodovico.

Doctor, believe it; you should have let me be condemned, you yourself should have condemned me to the utmost penalty of the law.

You know that I still persist in calling myself by my maiden name, for my husband's name is hateful to me, and it seems to me that, since his death, I am re-acquiring the habits, almost the thoughts, and almost living over again the events of my strong and vigorous youth. In this new virginity of spirit I do not wish to be the Signora Rosalba; I am Caterina Soave, justly simply Donna Caterina, as I was called in my girlhood, and as I am still called by the peasants here in my old home.

The Soaves are a very old family, and have always been country gentlemen, impatient of all disturbance and of all innovations. Very few of the family justified the gentleness of their name; * in the last century there still existed terrible hatred between brothers—nay, it appears even that Don Federico, my great-grandfather, murdered his brother, Don Cesare, who for love's sake had

* Soave means sweet.

abandoned his ecclesiastical career. Our home, a vast seignorial abode, is, as it were, steeped in memories. My father, Don Carlo, gave it the character which it still preserves, a curious combination of castle and modern habitation ; one side like an inaccessible owl's nest, sombre and severe, and the other like a fattoria pervaded by the spirit of earnest work. From the gate, over which was a coat-of-arms broken and chipped by stones thrown at it by every idle passer-by, one entered the great courtyard, which was embellished by a characteristic well placed near the porch ; here, on slender stone columns, rose, blackened and forbidding, the oldest portion of the house. The porch led into an immense hall with many windows, which looked into the inner courtyard, and from whence a staircase, in very bad repair, led into the wild and uncultivated but beautiful garden ; beyond the garden, outside the great iron gates, lay the meadows.

In winter-time, in the poorly-furnished, carpetless ground-floor rooms, bare of every modern luxury, the wood burnt and roared in the huge fireplaces, and the leaping flames seemed each like a separate passion ardent and fierce. From the windows was seen the garden, its plants and trees all spectral and silver with snow, and the ground a pure, untrodden carpet of dazzling whiteness, over which the wind sometimes swept in wild and furious gusts. In summer time the sun blazed down on every part of it. Only in the evenings, when the noisy sparrows fluttered round the open

windows, and more especially later on, when some inquisitive bat would fly in to visit the silent rooms, the spirits came in too.

You do not believe in spirits, Doctor, but I do. I believe in *my spirits*, who come slowly, softly round me in the darkness.

What was I saying? Ah, yes! I was saying that Luisa, Lorenza, and I grew up with these surroundings—"So bare and barren," said Luisa; "So cold," said Lorenza; "So austerely honest," said I—that I love those who pass their property down from generation to generation, clinging to it for centuries, and detest those who willingly part with it.

My father loved no one but me; I alone understood him, I alone comprehended his thoughts and his feelings. My mother, who was of an angelic goodness, wished only well to all, and lived in ntense adoration of those belonging to her. Although without education she had great natural common-sense; her husband had never admired her, not even in the first years of their marriage, when she came in all her bright and youthful beauty as a bride to that still and melancholy house; but nevertheless he had always approved of all she did, and treated her with dignified respect and unswerving devotion. My brothers all died in early infancy, and there remained only we three girls—Luisa, eight years older than I; myself, Caterina; and Lorenza, five years my junior.

My mother, ever patient, gave all her thoughts to religious instruction; my father, a man of high culture and education, took every opportunity of

instructing us in practical matters. Twice a week a professor came to us from the town, and then we had long, wearisome days of study, lesson after lesson, bewildering knowledge of various kinds imparted in hurried and confused succession. The Professor arrived early in the morning, dined with us, and went away in the evening. An elderly man was Professor Luigi Amati, a man of mediocre intelligence, who irritated me as much as I irritated him. I preferred my father, who taught me clearly and concisely and without pedantic rules. Amati understood this, and revenged himself by constantly comparing me with Luisa, who was always an attentive and diligent pupil. I knew I was no genius, I was intelligent and nothing more; I was certainly better suited for a life of physical rather than intellectual activity. Lorenza studied slowly and quietly; we elder ones, but especially Luisa, gave her all the help we could.

In my free hours I roamed about the fields; I was always out-of-doors, even in bad weather. Luisa spent her time reading; she had no fixed rules, and took books of every description from the library in the house. Lorenza, with her dreamy disposition, stayed with our mother, who was very musical and played a great deal. Sometimes, though not often, I put my fingers in my ears and silently watched the dear maternal face, into which the harmony of music brought such a celestial light. Then, in awe and amazement, I would turn from the room and go out, and not return to the house until a late hour.

I cared for neither music, nor literature, nor sculpture. The simplest pictures hardly succeeded in arresting my attention ; music irritated me ; literature failed to rouse my enthusiasm. Oh, how angry Professor Amati used to get when I showed my dislike for modern writers and my irreverence for the classics! When I said that literary men of all times and all countries appeared to me to be hysterical and bilious, steeped in egoism, who wish to inspire others, but refuse to let themselves be inspired by the natural and simple motions that move the soul! When I said that Dante, enamoured of hatred, that Petrarch, devoured by egoism, that Tasso, with his wild ravings betwixt heaven and earth, and Ariosto, the fantastic fool, did not, any of them, make me throb with a single feeling of sympathy or conviction! I, myself, was always capable of constancy. I had studied Latin that I might read the poems saturated with pantheistic passion. So I listened to Nature alone, with her sublime generosity, and let her speak to me through her magical creative power, through her apparent deaths and her miraculous resurrections.

Sculpture gave me, and gives me still, a sensation of terror ; to my mind it lacks colour and expression, and the soft delicacy that resembles life. Sculpture always seemed to me a funeral kind of art, belonging to world of deadly whiteness, a world of blind and hollow-eyed people. Moreover, I have never been able to overcome my repugnance to the sight of the nude. Very few paintings—that I will call *clothed*—inspire me with anything else than

respect for the artists who have known how to keep to the truth. Thus, during our first years of study, Luisa read, Lorenza dreamed, and I meditated.

And now Luisa is lost by her own deed, Lorenza lives in agony, and I have done what I have done.

I will first tell you about Luisa, and will describe to you the scene when she forswore herself.

We had been out riding, my father and I, and had passed many hours together, speaking little, as was our custom, but always understanding each other marvellously well. The vast landscape spoke for us, and in the quiet hours of sunset the vague odours of early spring were wafted in the air, while to the dying February invisible violets lifted their mysterious music of perfume. The eye wandered over the sharply-defined line of the high road, the snow-hardened earth, the trees still bare and leafless, and followed the hedges, already masses of young shoots ; it gazed into the changeless blue of the sky, and then, lower down, but far away, lingered lovingly on the broken, turquoise outline of a chain of hills. The bare fields were discoloured and dry, and made one think of a recent and terrible fire—by a strange contrast the frozen snow seemed to scorch the earth. Here and there it still lay in glistening strips upon the ground, no longer purely white, but frozen in masses, with pools of murky water like dark mirrors, in places half melted, crumbled, and broken.

These impressions, which stamp themselves upon the mind, we did not interpret by means

of another's thoughts—thoughts more or less powerful—but we felt them by the force of our own individualities, the healthy force of our own bodies, and we were proud of it, my father and I. Doctor, I have already told you that I believe in spirits; well, in the phenomena of spiritualism I place first *presentiments* and *dreams*. On our return, as I was dismounting in the courtyard where the shadows lengthen insensibly, there came over me that strange spiritual phenomenon which may, perhaps, be classed rather as a presentiment. I felt a sudden impulse of anger against some one, I did not know whom, some cruel and invisible being, an evil spirit who was preparing a terrible and irremediable catastrophe; and together with the sense of the irreparable, a feeling of divine tenderness invaded my heart. I felt distinctly and with certainty that that wave of affection was directed towards my sweet mother. In dismay, with an instinctive movement, I listened intently, but I heard nothing; there was a deadly silence, only my eyes seemed to be offended by some vague shadow which was slowly advancing towards me. I entered the hall, and beside the shuttered windows saw the little Lorenza, who was seated on the ground singing to herself and making a piece of furniture out of the painted cardboard of her journal *La Poupée Modèle*. When she saw me, the little one lifted her blonde head to smile at me, and her little, flexible, childish voice continued to murmur its improvised lullaby. I was quite calm when I stretched out

my hand to caress Lorenza's golden locks, but suddenly I felt myself obliged, as by some unknown force, to look towards the corner where my mother usually sat, working ; on the little table, amongst the skeins of embroidery silk, was laid a book. Then my hand—that which had intended stroking the child's golden hair, the right hand—felt compelled to touch this book, to take it up, and *someone* or *something* commanded me to read its title.

It was Tennyson's "May Queen."

Instantly the strange spirit phenomenon was repeated ; an immense anger took possession of me ; against whom ? and I was also filled with an overwhelming tenderness for my mother. I shuddered.

Doctor, you cannot possibly even imagine how I pity science, which laughs at these things. What I tell you was so *real*, was so true, that the memory of it, after eighteen years, is still rooted in my mind, vivid and terrible, and is far more real to me than the memory of the crime, which is so much more recent and more awful. I turned to leave the hall, re-crossed the porch, and ran swiftly up to the first floor. I held the train of my black riding-habit thrown over my arm, I still wore my felt hat and carried my whip in my gloved right hand.

As I opened the door of my mother's room I heard her gentle mournful voice exclaim :

"How I suffer!"

(She always complained in English, I don't know why.)

I stopped, as though I had been struck.

"How I suffer!"

Oh mother mine, so sacredly dear to me, why should you suffer?

As if in answer to my unspoken question I heard the dressing-room door open and my father's severe, calm voice inquire:

"Who causes you suffering, Anna?"

There was no answer—I decided to enter. Then I saw my poor mother leaning back helplessly in her armchair beside the window, which she must have opened, feeling ill and with a sudden sense of suffocation. I saw my father standing motionless and dignified at the drawing-room door, and I also saw my sister Luisa standing erect in the middle of the room, her magnificent figure drawn up to its full height and quivering with defiance.

Listen, Doctor Alvise. I have read what the newspapers said about me at the time of the trial, and I cannot imagine why they should have described me as "a sullen and dangerous beauty, intensely passionate, a mysterious creature full of strange and disquieting fascinations." Oh, how I laughed at those empty phrases, so presumptuous and false, chosen at random from their stupid modern jargon! I was never beautiful, and even Lorenza, with her fragile and flower-like delicacy, cannot be called beautiful. But Luisa was magnificent, with the distinctive beauty of an antique goddess; her features were regular, her brown eyes were like two wonderful stars, and her small

mouth and bright red lips had the curved lines that indicate a passionate nature. I never loved my elder sister, but her strong, healthy beauty pleased and attracted me. If you had seen her that evening as she stood there, audacious and defiant, she would have reminded you of a magnificent tigress ready for a furious spring rather than on her defence; her face betrayed no feminine weakness, for its expression was almost savage, and her luxuriant black curls surrounded her proud features as with a rich frame. She must have been speaking for some time, for her whole body quivered with agitation and all the wealth of her hair had fallen down, a long thick braid rested on her shoulder and the rebellious curls clung about her neck and round her ears.

The calamitous and irreparable event, of which I had been mysteriously forewarned, was about to take place.

"Who causes you suffering, Anna?"

My poor mother had made no answer. Evidently Luisa was waiting to be questioned, and from her attitude we would divine that her answer would be decisive. By we, I mean my father, my mother, and myself, for Luisa had already ceased to belong to the family. It was, perhaps, for this reason that Don Carlo Soave hesitated before pronouncing this terrible sentence.

"It is you then, Luisa, who would dishonour us?"

And then we had to listen to a bitter stream of sacrilegious words.

"Dishonour you?" began my sister in a tone of biting irony, "well, then, let us discuss this supposed dishonour, since it appears I am to be plagued with this melodramatic language."

My mother sighed piteously; I could not believe my ears, I dared not look at my father's blazing eyes. Luisa! What devil had entered into her soul?

I was seventeen years old at this time and Luisa was twenty-five.

It was the first revelation I had ever had of the violence which sensual love arouses in certain natures, and my only feeling was one of disgust; I had no excuse for it, no pity, nothing but hatred and contempt.

"I love, I adore, I idolise Antonio Valenti!" cried the rebel, with a smile on her lips and a flash of almost exalted pride in her eyes.

"Hush! Be quiet!" entreated my mother in a faint whisper, as if her strength had suddenly forsaken her.

"Go on!" commanded my father.

Then I was frightened. I knew that fear-inspiring tone of authority, that tone which I loved for its strength and which seemed to me like an intangible inheritance and which thrilled through my very veins.

"Ah, but *she* was not afraid, not she; love had given her courage for more terrible struggles still, even for a long series of struggles, which are in themselves an expiation, and into the first of which she now boldly plunged. She continued:

"How can this dishonour you? I do not understand you. I never was and never shall be the mistress of Antonio, of *my* Antonio, for I mean to marry him and I will marry him!"

I was stunned, and I listened to her with a feeling of nausea that seemed to strangle me, and my mother had closed her sorrowful eyes as if in horror; only my father had the courage to look at her, without moving an eyelid, had even the strength to smile. But, oh my God! What a smile!

She, the blasphemer, was as inexhaustible in attack as in defence; she seemed the inspired and eloquent priestess of some unknown religion, of the worship of liberty, a liberty absolute and outrageous. Her faith, her ironical and miserable faith, that was founded on the love of a man, flashed from her eyes and glowed in her beautiful face, made her powerful, magnificent and awful.

"The nation may be free, the press free, the elections free, thought free, worship free, everything may be free except the heart! It is absurd!"

"Oh Lord, Lord! who taught you to speak so?" murmured my mother.

"Go on" said my father again.

And Luisa never stopped.

"How often have I thrown myself in your arms, mother, with terrible fits of sobbing that seemed to break my heart! How often, mother, you can say—tell them, you tell them! I implored your aid, did I not, I besought you to intercede with father for me? But it was no, no, always no.

You were too weak to face the wrath which I now must brave alone—you had only words of empty piety with which to oppose the passion that was devouring me. Religion, respect for parents, good sense, dignity! It's a mediæval tyranny that I detest. I am of age; I love, I am free. And I am going away; yes, I am going away. I am tired of concealing a deep and noble love, and he is right to doubt me, for I lie and I oblige him to lie—oblige him . . . . him! How long it has lasted! To go out at night, hardly daring to breathe, to steal downstairs barefoot, like a thief, to slip out into the garden and glide along the wall, to unbolt the gate, to fall trembling into his arms for one moment, to say farewell in agony of soul, with a voice of terror, only to begin it all over again the next night, and to renew the same base subterfuge. It is unworthy of me who do not blush to love him, and unworthy of him who is loyalty itself. But now there has been enough of all that. So far all that has passed between us has been chaste and pure . . . . but to-morrow? Who can *tell?* I have waited until now in a mad dream of expectation, for I always hoped to obtain your consent.

"A mad dream, truly!" exclaimed my father at last.

"Alas! I know it. And it is for that reason I am going away!" broke in Luisa.

I felt furiously angry; suddenly, through all this fierce eloquence, there was revealed to me a shameful wrong which I had never even suspected. I had often heard Antonio Valenti mentioned; he

was one of our tenants, a curious type of peasant, a creature excited by reading books ill-suited to his imperfect education. I had been told that Valenti talked of revolts, of strikes, of fantastic ideas of right and wrong, posing ridiculously as the apostle of a new era of absolute liberty, of an era of free thought in a perfectly free society. I had been told, too, of the hatred borne by the Valenti family towards the "palace people," and of odious threats addressed to Carlo Soave, at which I had merely laughed. It is not necessary to call oneself a Socialist in order to be ungrateful, and the hatred of those who receive benefits for those who bestow them was too ancient a tale to make any impression on me.

In every attempt to introduce an innovation I have always discerned the influence of some distorted and individual mind. Once I had even noticed Antonio's face; he was standing in the middle of a field that had just been reaped, giving orders to a group of peasants who were his dependants; but his gestures were not those of a friend, his voice was not that of a protector—they were the accents and the gestures of a tyrant, and, taking one despot with another, I prefer the so-called tyranny of a gentleman. Thus, only half-educated and half-capable of understanding his business, Valenti was a dangerous man. One all-devouring idea was hidden within his broad forehead; in his well-shaped and finely-modelled chin could be read the evidence of a powerful obstinacy. Never had there passed through my mind, however, the

remotest suspicion of the truth. This creature of an inferior race enamoured of a Soave! Above all, Luisa herself vulgarly in love!

"Go!" exclained my father, but without anger, "you only inspire me with compassion."

"Oh, Carlo!" said mother in a voice of supplication and gentle humility.

Then he turned to her who had been for so many years his devoted companion, he took one of her slender hands and raised it to his lips with a gallantry that was full of emotion, saying in a low and husky voice:

"Be still, Anna, be still, oh my wife! We have but two daughters now."

My mother burst into tears, while I stood by trembling, humiliated by a disgrace which was none of mine and which yet involved us all.

Luisa was evidently surprised at meeting with so little opposition, and was silent. Meanwhile it had grown dark in the room, and faces could no longer be distinguished, but in the gloom I could see the dim forms of those who were speaking, and the impression of what was then said has remained in my memory as something between a fantasy and a reality. The fantastic impression was agonising, and agonising, nay, cruel even, as the reality.

"Remember, Luisa," said my father, "that all is now over between us."

"It is well," answered this rebellious daughter, without the slightest tremor in her voice.

"You will not have a penny of dowry."

"We do not want money!" The words rang with pride and contempt.

"You can carry away with you nothing belonging to the house."

"That is what we both wish, Antonio and I!"

"Neither the family lace nor your mother's jewels, remember that!"

There was a short sarcastic laugh, and as I thought lovingly of those precious things which belonged to us all by inheritance, I heard these biting words:

"Such things can only please the mediæval soul of my sister Caterina."

"Wretch!" I murmured in the darkness, moving suddenly forward towards that sacrilegious voice and raising my whip with instinctive violence.

I felt my arm seized by a small but vigorous hand, and once more heard those ironical accents:

"We are not in a country adapted to the gentle discipline of the knout, Donna Caterina Soave!"

"Caterina!" said my father in a tone of command.

I stopped, but my heart beat wildly with anger, and my brain reeled with horror and indignation.

My mother, comprehending that all was over, softly murmured the gentle prayer:

"May God help her!"

"Amen," replied Luisa, but there was no faith in the reply; she turned towards the door and I felt her dress brush mine as she passed me.

"Poor and accursed!" exclaimed the injured father.

But she who was departing for ever had the last word.

"Rich in love," she said, "and blessed in my love."

We heard her descend the dark stairs quickly, as if some magic light accompanied her flight.

My mother was still sobbing; she feared my father's anger, and he remained silent.

Once again the door opened.

"Oh, little mother, how dark it is!" said the soft and dreamy voice of Lorenza; "are we not going to say the rosary this evening?"

I heard the sound of the beads as the rosary slipped through those dear hands, those dear and trembling hands.

"In the name of the Father . . . ." began that saintly woman, trembling with superstitious fear.

"Of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," continued the old nobleman instantly.

"Amen," added Lorenza and I devoutly, as we knelt in the darkness.

This is for you, Doctor, for you who have spoken of my passionate nature.

At twenty, not only did I know nothing of love, not only had I no instinctive desire to love, but anything like a love-story filled me with amused astonishment, almost with compassion. With a free mind and a tranquil heart I nursed my father, who was no longer able to be my companion in my long excursions. He was tormented by gout, and even my presence scarcely seemed to console him.

To please him I read aloud books on botany, the only sort of literature I could tolerate, though far more seductive to me than the scientific explanations of Jussieu and Linnæus were the perpetual new discoveries the fields afforded me. Meantime, Lorenza, now fifteen, still occupied herself with reading, as one reads books of devotion, the rapid productions of that French school which has for motto, *Prière et Travail.* What are they called? Books like *Le Journal de Marguerite; Marguerite à Vingt Ans; La Main de Velours;* romances in which it is always shown that obedience to the Pope is the only obedience possible, and that a noble young lady cannot be happy unless she arrays herself in the *cornets blancs de sœur de charité.* Once the whim seized me to take possession of one of these papal books—*Après la Pluie le Beau Temps,* it was called, I think, by the Comtesse de Ségur—and I flung it out of the window into the moat, where it was received with immense enthusiasm by the frogs.

Lorenza cried about it. Not long afterwards she was obliged to torment herself with bread and milk of English manufacture, those tales that every one regards as a penance: *The Lamplighter, Ladybird, Mabel Vaughan, The Rose of Lebanon,* and a few innocent German novels by Marlitt. Doctor, do you know anything more tiresome or more useless than these books, which make you assist at the cutting of innumerable pieces of bread and butter, while the heroes and heroines drink an absurd number of cups of tea during the course

of three volumes, only to marry each other in the idiotic manner at the end of the third ?

My mother was dead, and the house had grown sadder and grimmer than ever. Lorenza's light-coloured gowns struck the only gay note in the whole place, only the soft blue eyes of this unconscious child spoke of hope and reflected the wondrous light of her pure dreams. She had a passion for dressing in white ; white muslin, costly white woollen fabrics, or gleaming white moiré, and sometimes she would appear in pale blue or delicate rose-colour.

These gowns worried me ; I could not bear to look at them ; I could not endure seeing Lorenza dressed in this way ; even in her exquisite grace of movement there was, to me, something repellent. From her body, so slender that it hardly seemed solid, there seemed to emanate, as it were, the atmosphere of a church. I felt as if she ought to carry lilies in her waxen hands, masses of lilies, and her pale lips often trembled and moved as though in prayer. She always gave me the feeling that I saw a vision ; silent, slight, and pale as a shadow, she seemed not to belong to this world.

The city, which we had visited very seldom, had no attractions for us, nor could it arouse any enthusiasm in my savagely independent spirit or in the meditative mind of Lorenza.

Until I was twenty-three I had never thought of marriage, nor had any suitor presented himself who interested me. Still, there came a day when it seemed as if I *could have loved*. I particularly

wish you to know this. If there was ever, even for a moment, anything like love in my life, it was a sentiment absolutely Platonic; a slight spasm of the spirit, an acute regret, dominated instantly by proud strength of will. Naturally tranquil and chaste, I have never been tormented by the assaults of sensuality.

Hear me! Hear me! I will tell you all briefly. I do not wish to slur over that divine memory; I will tell you before I come to that dark tragedy. I must tell you, to explain, to demonstrate to you, to persuade you how mistaken you have been.

Listen, Doctor.

I have already spoken to you, have I not, of my passion for perfumes? But I have not told you of the particular influence which certain perfumes have on me. A complex influence, a series of phenomena of a character increasing in intensity. It has the character of sweetness bordering upon a spasm. First a healthy sensation of pleasure, then a slight giddiness, a strange intoxication, forms, dreams, flowers floating in space, and finally a violent palpitation of the heart, a singing in the ears, sharp pains in the temples, often really acute, and sometimes loss of sight. For this reason I almost always inhale with closed eyes. Truly a strange and powerful intoxication! So strange, so powerful, that once I seriously thought that in this way had been revealed to me the voluptuous delirium of the embraces and the kisses that other women find in love.

Once more I must tell you I have always

had forewarning of the approach of important moments in my life. This is perhaps the cause of another phenomenon, by means of which I seem to have *already seen* people whom I meet for the first time, to have *already heard* the sound of certain voices, to have *already lived* through certain critical moments. Often, at the approach of some happy hour, it appeared to me that the air became full of fragrance; not the natural fragrance that was borne in through the open windows from the fresh country, or wafted from sweet-smelling flowers kissed by the breeze, but they were overpowering perfumes, imagined by a troubled brain, artificial odours, mystical scents as of sandal-wood, incense, or amber. Do you understand? I entreat you to believe me! This is no fantastic tale, I swear to you; it is reality. And it is this reality which must undeceive you.

So it happened on that morning in June.

Fortunio was with me, the great Danish hound that loved me. I remember that I stroked his head, which was turned towards me with humble, vigilant fidelity. Being tired, I had halted near the torrent, and was watching the clear swift waters in which the reflection of the sun and the plants made moving spots, and patches of golden-green light. The air was soft and cool, full of the humming sound of insects and fluttering leaves, and the chatter of the locusts in conversation with the indefatigable crickets. How, I do not know, but I became conscious that I was enveloped in the perfume of amber, though the scent I had used

that morning was Russian violets. Fortunio, by shaking himself, made me raise my eyes, and thus it was that I saw *him*, unexpectedly, leaning against a tree a few steps away from me.

How long had he been there? Was he there before I came, or had he come upon me accidentally?

This man, young and handsome, whom I did not know, this man of a noble and intelligent countenance, gazed at me with affectionate insistance. Nor was I offended. From his eyes, of a peculiar blue, there seemed to flow a stream of light, full of enchantment. It was not the first time that I had felt this magic influence, but when and where had I had first known its sweetness?

Romantic appearances have never affected me. I made a kindly gesture of salutation, and in the most natural manner interrogated this unknown personage, whose eyes were still bent upon me with that singular fixedness which endows a glance with sadness.

"Who are you, sir?"

He started, bowed and smiled.

"Tell me, first, have I the honour of speaking to Donna Caterina Soave?"

The voice was melodious, the accent slightly foreign.

"Yes; have you seen me before?"

"Many times."

The musical voice did not hesitate; it only trembled very slightly.

"When? How?"

I questioned him calmly. It is certain that in the country one does not experience that sense of oppression under unusual circumstances which, according to the few romances I have read, is the case in modern drawing-rooms.

"Here, in the meadows, in the wood, beside the torrent . . . . for many days past. Once, in the evening, I saw you leaning against your garden gate; the hour was late, and the moonlight fell upon your face. . . . . Ah, forgive me; I forget myself! Pardon me for daring to speak to you in this way. It was a sort of watch I kept over you. Do not be offended; it was homage paid to the fairy of this place, to which I am a stranger, and I was happy in following you without disturbing you. Fairies are always enveloped in their own thoughts. . . . .

I listened to him without the least sensation of surprise. I *knew* that he would talk in that way, with that smile of tender melancholy; I knew beforehand what he would say.

He continued:

"To-day it was Victor Hugo whose *magic* drew me to the stream, and I owe him a debt of gratitude."

He spoke his words meaningly, and approached a few steps nearer to me, offering me a small book, which I took without hesitation. I have had those poems ever since; I remember that the book was open, and that, in a low voice, I read this verse:

"Il n'est rien sous le ciel qui n'ait sa loi secrète,
Son lieu cher et choisi, son abri, sa retraite,

Où mille instincts profonds nous fixent nuit et jour ;
Le pêcheur a la barque où l'espoir l'accompagne,
Les cygnes ont le lac, les aigles la montagne,
Les âmes ont l'amour . . . ."

I paused thoughtfully for a moment.

"*Les âmes ont l'amour* . . . ." he repeated, in a low voice.

We looked at each other in silence.

I turned over the pages of the beautiful little book, stopping twice to read certain passages. The first were the lines :

" Hier la nuit d'été qui nous prêtait ses voiles
Était digne de toi, tant elle avait d'étoiles ! "

" Like that evening when the moon flooded your face with her pale light," he murmured.

I was silent a moment, and then read again :

" Oh ! n'insultez jamais une femme qui tombe !
Qui sait sous quel fardeau la pauvre âme succombe ? "

I closed the book indignantly, and gave it back to him ; a guilty woman inspired with strong repugnance. I gazed straight in front of me, and there, as if evoked by the lines I had read, I saw passing on the other side of the stream she who had been Donna Luisa Soave. She had with her her three children, whom I had never caressed, who had no greeting for me, and who did not know their grandfather. Six years had sufficed to fade Luisa's splendid beauty, but nevertheless, though poorly dressed, with a shawl crossed over her breast like a peasant-woman and a face of utter

weariness, she was still proud and stately, and as she passed me she looked at me defiantly, magnificent in her terrible pride.

I shivered and grew red with shame, not because the outcast might misinterpret my meeting with *him*, but for fear that he might know Luisa's dark story. I started with pleasure when I heard him ask :

"Do you know Victor Hugo?"

"No."

"Perhaps you do not care for poetry?"

"For neither poetry not prose," I confessed, frankly. "I never read and never write. I am very ignorant," I added, laughing.

He hesitated, half-surprised and half-amused.

"You never write? Really?"

"No, really."

"But . . . . if I were to write to you . . . . ?"

"If you were to write to me," I said, to draw him on, guessing his meaning.

"Who knows, an important letter perhaps, a letter that was a confession, requiring an answer that might decide a man's whole life. . . . ."

"I should prefer to be asked verbally. I would rather answer in person. I do not like writing; speech is better, believe me. That which is written becomes almost always a falsehood by implication or misunderstanding."

The young man looked at me in some perplexity, but he was greatly impressed.

"Consequently," he said at last, looking me straight in the eyes, "you would have the courage

to give an answer, even a cruel one, in person?"

"Yes, I should have the courage; does that surprise you?"

"A little."

"Does it surprise you that I should have the courage to be truthful?"

"Woman, as I have dreamed of her, is, above all things, kind."

"So there is a question of sex even in the matter of sincerity?" I asked, with ironical surprise.

"Oh, it is of no consequence!" he exclaimed firmly, and then, in that voice which seemed an echo from heaven, he added:

"I like you just as you are."

At that moment I became keenly aware of a mysterious odour of amber.

"Will you not tell me who you are?" I asked with a smile.

"My name is Wilfred Heyse," he replied simply. Then, after a long pause, he said: "I come from Berlin, I am a painter, and at this moment the guest of my friend, Lodovico Rosalba."

"Are you a Protestant?" I asked anxiously.

My anxiety infected him with a mortal fear that spread a pallor over his face and quenched the light in those eyes I never can forget.

"Yes . . . ."

I seemed to see my mother once more, my sweet dead mother, who was so full of piety; I

thought of my father and his religious beliefs, profound, immovable, and, I know not how, the pale lips of Lorenza, those lips that always seemed to breathe a prayer, appeared as in a vision to me, curved in disdainful compassion.

"No!" I cried, stretching out my arms as though to ward off the struggle I instinctively foresaw, "No!"

It is one of my firm convictions that every struggle is inevitable. Why, therefore, should we abandon ourselves to the easy bent of our minds, why yield to the indignity of subterfuge, to the cowardly humility of useless supplication, buoying ourselves up with unworthy hopes, trusting to time to bring about the changes we desire.

My father . . . . And then, the example of Luisa . . . . "Farewell!"

The word was almost a cry of grief that I flung at him as I fled. He was, perhaps, too nobly timid, or too adorably proud, since he did not follow me, and I did not hear him call me back. Perhaps he fully understood the uselessness of any further appeal, and I never again beheld Wilfred Heyse

Not a word of passion had been spoken, nor might he, perchance, have been able to feel certain that he loved me; yet I feel convinced that *he*, as well as I, bears for ever the scar of a lost happiness.

Wilfred Heyse.

Wilfred . . . .

Doctor, *he* never had my letter, the impassioned

letter of impatient desire. Neither *he* nor any *other*. No one ever received a love-letter from me.

Two years later, in obedience to my father's will, I was betrothed to Lodovico Rosalba, Wilfred's friend. This coincidence troubled me but slightly; I have ever found my greatest happiness in obedience to the laws imposed by blood and duty. Very few words from Don Carlo Soave sufficed to persuade his favourite child.

"Caterina. . . . ."

"Father?"

"Do you know Lodovico Rosalba?"

I understood instantly, and I even smiled.

"Oh, dear father, how is it possible that I should not know him? The Rosalbas are the richest proprietors in the neighbourhood, with the exception of ourselves, and they are not people of yesterday, I believe."

At this the severe old gentleman himself ought to have smiled.

"And tell me, you sarcastic little person, do you like Lodovico?"

"Do you like him yourself, father?" I asked instead of replying to the question.

"What do you mean, you artful child?"

"He has asked you for my hand, has he not?"

"He has."

"Well?"

"Well, as you know, Lodovico is young, handsome, and rich; some of his ideas are a little different from ours, it is true, but nevertheless he

is a paragon compared to the young men of the present day. Besides, he adores you."

"Are you sure of that, father?"

"Oh, that does not surprise me!" cried my father proudly.

Poor father!

"Will he resign himself to a country life?"

"You will come to live here with me."

"Then you may tell him that I accept him," I said, kneeling to crave his paternal blessing.

A few hours later Lodovico arrived. He knew already that I had consented, and he threw a perfect shower of roses at my feet, gazing at me tenderly. He embraced my father, who had looked on at this little scene, greatly touched; then, turning to me again, he took my hands, pressed them silently and raised them to his burning lips. That ardent touch aroused in me a profound disgust, of which I instantly felt ashamed. Lodovico was to be my husband, I owed him obedience, respect, and, if not love, of which I was perhaps incapable, at least affection. He did not perceive the repulsion he aroused in me by his kiss, the first innocent kiss on the hand. And when, afterwards. . . . . Oh, my God!

I was glad, however, that he did not notice my agitation, or did not rightly interpret it, and shortly afterwards I consented to go with him into the garden. Night was falling, the air was full of sadness, although the spring was warm and sweet with the scent of blossoms. The intricate masses of the ancient trees, the paths overgrown by rank

grass, thick, of a damp dark green that was almost brown, the uncultivated beds, the wild flowers of strange, spontaneous growth, all had a *bizarre* appearance, as if preparing for some mysterious tragedy.

It was there that I listened for the first time, to words of passion.

"Thanks, Caterina! I adore you, Caterina! I was afraid of you, afraid you would refuse me, but instead of that you were kind, you said 'Yes' immediately. My blessed lady! Dear, dear lady mine! Now you are my bride, my darling bride. Will you not tell me you love me? Will you be faithful to me? Speak, Caterina, say something to me, let me hear your voice. Will you love me? Will you be true to me?"

"Yes," I answered resolutely, and I felt that I spoke the truth, that it would be so.

I looked at him, that being full of fancies, who imagined at that moment that he loved me madly. He was young and handsome; I was already bound to him by an inviolable promise of loyalty and fidelity, and yet, when he drew nearer to me as if attracted by me (observe this, as if attracted by me, for all the while my spirit vigorously repulsed him), when he bent his tall form in order to see me better, to kiss me, and, yet more, when I felt his mouth press mine, I experienced no excitement, I only felt a thrill of horror, a sense of suffocation, of insupportable physical suffering. It seemed as though I had endured an ignoble contact, had been the victim of a brutal insult.

I pushed him back, extending my arms in desperate appeal.

Lodovico smiled; somehow, it seemed to me, that his smile was one of indulgent satisfaction, which in that one second revealed to me with crude frankness all the fatuity of the male sex, and I shuddered thereat.

"Do you love me?" asked Lodovico encircling my waist with his strong arms; "do you love me?"

I started at the question, but did not answer.

"Tell me, Caterina you love no other, do you? You have no fancies no memories?" he asked, in a voice low with secret fear.

"I love no one; I have no memories, no fancies."

A silence fell on us then.

"Wilfred Heyse?" insinuated Lodovico, presently, quivering with suspense.

"What of him?"

I was so quiet that he was instantly reassured.

"I know, I know," he said, smiling, "it was quite a poetic affair; Wilfred only spoke to you once, but you, my proud, wild one. . . . . Oh, my darling, my darling!" I felt that his lips were again approaching mine, I tried to avoid them, and saw in his face an instantaneous, momentary look of ferocity; he might have been a miser whose treasure was about to be stolen from him.

I was frightened, and, closing my eyes, I submitted to the pressure of another long, long kiss.

"Tell me, at least, that you will love me!" entreated Lodovico, when he at last released me.

"Oh, I hope so!" I cried, clasping my hands as a sign of fervent sincerity and prayer.

He smiled at me again, but he was wounded by my want of faith and absence of enthusiasm.

After this first interview, when I was once more alone, I felt a sense of liberation. I thought of my mother and longed for her presence, but I did not sob or weaken myself with vain tears, I only thought of her with infinite and desperate yearning.

During the few months that preceded our marriage I was able to become acquainted with the character of my betrothed. I found that I was bound to a man of weak and fantastic nature, who required continual excitement to keep his emotions and feelings alive. I felt humiliated by the knowledge that, whilst he did not really love me, he desired me with an ardour that was in itself an insult. The conviction that a deception had been played on my father filled me with profound grief, but on no account would I have retracted my word. When my glance fell on the white hair of the only being who adored me and understood me, when I marked the smiles of the infirm and weary old man who was the only creature I ever worshipped, I felt strong, endowed with new courage, inflamed with an enthusiastic love of obedience and duty.

I tried to conform to the strange things demanded of me by Lodovico. He had constantly some new *bizarre* notions, some new folly to propose. Often, without meaning to do so, I said

things that offended him, when he would turn pale with vexation. Then I grew silent, but he did not ask my pardon, and I submitted with as good a grace as I could.

We enjoyed, Lodovico and I, every possible liberty of seeing each other and talking together, and we were allowed to walk out alone. Curiously enough, this liberty distressed him; in order to please him I was obliged to grant him nocturnal interviews, when he would wait for me in dark, mysterious places, where the surroundings were dreary and gloomy, and where I had to meet him with noiseless steps, like a shadow, to give, as he said, some touch of poetry to our union, which was becoming bourgeoise for lack of obstacles to it.

But few rays of moonlight could penetrate into the thick woods; here and there, where the branches and dense foliage opened, stars appeared on high, like gleaming sparks of gold in an embroidered tapestry.

In such places, appropriate to a mystery which our situation rendered ridiculous, Lodovico addressed me in a passionate language very different from that which he employed in the daytime in the rooms of our house, which he said were too deserted and too severe. He whispered the most flattering things, talked to me in the wildest way.

"I would fain carry thee away into an unknown land," he said, "into a land created for love. Caterina, do you understand? Kate, Katie, my Kitty . . . . no, no, Rina is better, Erina better still."

I listened in silence. Did he not perceive that it repelled me to be called by other names than that by which I had always been addressed by lips dearer, far dearer to me than were his. My name was not poetical enough for him, but I found in it a poetry of the soul, an echo, as it were, of my home.

"Erina is better suited to you; it might be the name of some proud fairy like yourself, with black velvet eyes like yours, and a wealth of black hair like yours. This hair, this beautiful hair, I should like to see it loosened, falling over your shoulders, I long to see you surrounded by the dusky splendour of that unbound mass; for, though perchance you do not know it, or do not think of it, these black and shining tresses are at the same time magnificent and heavy. Do you understand? Ornaments of amber would suit you, jewels with a reflection of pale gold. And your complexion, too, has the faintest amber tone. Oh! you are beautiful, Erina, and I worship you! But you, my heart, of what are you thinking? You are so silent; why do you never talk? It would seem as if you only tolerated me."

And it was true; I only tolerated that impetuous flow of words which gave me the impression as of a treacherous torrent, I tolerated the glamour with which he surrounded me, but which could not involve me. Yet I tried to be docile, tried to love him, and felt that I never, never should deceive him.

What could I say to him?

Then he would kiss me, ruffling my hair with caresses that did not excite me, and yet intoxicated him, an intoxication that ever increased in intensity, and of whose progress I was fully sensible. He continued to kiss me, with an endless succession of little kisses, of which he never wearied, a long caress of covetous lips that passed lightly over my cheeks, and clung to my mouth, and touched my neck and behind my ears, to end in a long, long, horrible pressure upon the nape.

I started, shivered, and trembled; it was torture; sharp, scratching thorns that tore into my flesh could not have hurt me more.

Even now, as I recall it all, I feel a sense of nausea, an intense and profound disgust, all my being thrills with a feeling of repulsion and revolt.

And you say, Doctor, that I killed Lodovico from an impulse of sensual jealousy?

It is not possible. Perhaps the crime was a consequence of those very caresses to which I submitted from a sense of duty.

For this reason I strove to overcome the physical repugnance through which I suffered such unspeakable tortures.

Lodovico's vanity prevented him from perceiving the heroism of my sacrifice; he never suspected the truth; he was deceived as you were, and I would have forgiven him.

It was treason that sealed his fate, his own treason.

That evening . . . .

. . . . I have come to the moment whence dates . . . .

It was a lonely evening in June, as calm and fair as this. I had stayed to pray with Lorenza in the deepening dusk, and had listened to her weak voice trembling with emotion; she was agitated and excited even in her devotions by the thought that the next day I should be a bride. At last she flung her arms about my neck and asked:

"Are you thinking of mother?"

I answered, half-inaudibly:

"Yes, I am thinking of her."

Yet another question.

"Will you always care for me?"

"Yes; always."

"If we were only at peace with Luisa . . . ."

"Hush!" I exclaimed, instantly interrupting the girl's weak voice. I stepped out into the portico, and was watching the swallows as they chased each other in and out between the columns. In memory I can still hear their sharp cries. My dress seemed to retain the perfume of the wisteria, which was in full flower; in the dark its graceful clusters could be seen outlined one above another along their slender stem, across the dark wall, clinging to the old balcony and framing it in verdure, and I lingered to inhale the scent.

The hour of my appointment with Lodovico drew near.

I hesitated.

Why?

Will you tell me why I hesitated at that moment?

Can your science by any chance explain that hesitation?

No. It cannot. Well, then . . . .

But what care I for science? Listen, rather, to what I have to say.

Every evening, for two months, had I gone to that useless appointment; I had always gone with a tranquil heart and without any indecision. On that evening, the last of all, I hesitated. I reached the entrance gate, and, just as I was about to open it, it seemed—nay, I was certain—that I felt on my arm the pressure of a hand that drew me back. Then there suddenly appeared to me the dear face of my mother, bathed in tears, and at the same moment I felt as if I had touched, as it floated past me, the white mantle of a spirit.

Lodovico! . . . .

Ah! doubtless it was a mysterious warning; an unseen protector was striving to hinder me, was protesting against what I was about to do.

I remembered the evening on which Luisa had abjured all the good feelings that should have bound her to her own people, and I shuddered. But he who was to be my husband was waiting for me, and it was my *duty* to obey him.

I hesitated no longer.

I went across the fields, and took one of the little narrow paths that led through the ripe corn. By some strange mental power, excited by my spiritual warning, I seemed to see the fields as clearly as though it had been daylight, as they lay before me,

fair and yellow, beneath the warm and fruitful caresses of the sun. The grain glowed like flames of gold, and in amongst it the soft blue cornflowers were strewn here and there in masses, like delicate poetry scattered amid the generous prose of Nature. At last I reached the place we had agreed upon for that evening. It was not in the dense wood that we were to meet, but in the ruins. You know them; almost every country place has a castle, an ex-convent, some dilapidated edifice or other to show to strangers. Our ruins consist of a tumble-down tower, into which it is impossible to enter, and a large mass of stones of semicircular form, a regular druidical heap, something between a tomb and an altar.

Lodovico was there.

The sight of him brought me back to reality. Everything around was white in the soft moonlight, and we two, gazing at each other in agitation, our features dimly visible, must have looked like spectres.

"To-morrow, Erina," he said, with passionate impatience.

"To-morrow, Lodovico," I replied.

I thought he paused to listen to the calm intonation of my voice.

Holding me to him, arm-in-arm, he drew me slowly along. We walked among the grey stones that the moon made white, sparkling, and almost luminous; in places they were sharp-cut at the edges, and the light fell on them clearly and distinctly; others were smooth, like seats, and the light rested on them gently and evenly.

"To-morrow," said Lodovico again, softly passing his lips over my hair.

I was silent.

"Do you think," suddenly asked the man to whom I was about to belong, "do you think, my Kate, that you can always remain faithful to me?"

"I believe I can," I answered, as I stood still, and my eyes sought to look straight into his.

"Oh, dear innocent! Nothing is eternal here below," said Lodovico, sententiously.

I felt a chill run through my blood.

"What do you mean?" I asked, impetuously and angrily.

"I mean, you quick-tempered one, that everything must die, even love."

"But why, Lodovico, do you tell me this on the eve of our marriage?"

"Who knows?" he said, with a fatuous smile.

And he walked on again. But I stopped him; I felt chilled in my very soul.

"What did you mean to say? What did you mean to say?"

"Nothing, my dearest; nothing. That is, I meant to say that everything must come to an end; life ceases, and love ceases first . . . . or changes."

"Lodovico!"

"Erina . . . ."

"No, no! do not come near me just now. I want to know; do you understand? I want to know, to ask about it . . . . explain yourself!"

"Question me, my queen."

"Love passes, I know; or better say love changes its character with the years, and becomes a calm affection."

"Erina . . . ."

"A tranquil affection, a mixture of devotion, of habit, of respect. I saw this in my own home; I observed it with my own parents."

"Those were other days, my sweet darling."

"Other days? Oh, do not speak so! Love changes, but fidelity remains. Other days? Are there any days set apart for treachery, then?"

"Words, fine words, my treasure!"

"But we swear, Lodovico, we swear solemnly before men piously, in church, at the altar, before God!"

"How many, many useless, how many impossible things we swear, my sweetheart!"

"Do not speak so, do not, Lodovico!" I cried, imploringly, do not speak so lightly! And it is you, you, who dare to speak thus; you who rave to me of love and passion! Well, then, listen! I, you understand, I, who have never murmured burning words to you, I, who have never kissed you madly . . . ."

"No indeed, alas!"

"I, who to-morrow shall swear eternal fidelity to you, I will keep my oath, I will keep your honour pure, safe and unsullied, ready to kill myself sooner than betray you!"

"Like Lucretia of Rome! So much the better!" laughed Lodovico, trying to embrace me.

I repulsed him, gasping and dismayed. For

the first and only time in my life I had spoken under the impulse of excitement, but soon regained my self-possession. "Listen to me," I said, and my voice was so deep and decided that I myself trembled at the sound of it, "you admit already, from this moment, the possibility of your betraying me, do you not? I tell you, then, that for a man who professes to be in love this is as surprising as it is odious."

"But, Erina, what a tragic speech! and all about a mere joke!"

"You were not joking; I feel it, I know it. You have said things which are very serious when spoken on the eve of what you consider your happiness. But enough of this. I am going to tell you something much more serious, infinitely more serious."

Here I perceived that Lodovico looked at me curiously and incredulously; there was in his gaze a manifest admiration for me, but no affection.

"Listen to me, Lodovico, for I swear the truth of what I am going to tell you upon my immortal soul."

"You frighten me, Erina, you are so beautiful and so terrible!"

I understood the ironical gallantry of his words, and for a moment, conscious of the present, conscious of the future, I looked at him with genuine pity.

"I swear to you," I continued very slowly, "that if you dare to betray me, vilely, making

use of lies and subterfuges, such as are generally employed with wretched women, I will kill you."

For a moment it seemed to me as though the only living thing there was that ineffable white light, which was but a thing inanimate. Lodovico stood motionless, his eyes fixed upon me in mute astonishment.

Then suddenly he burst into a cynical laugh, which sealed the doom of both himself and me. As he approached to embrace me my spirit knew that it was already preparing itself to commit a crime.

Now began those seven long, interminable years during which Time and I lay in wait for Lodovico Rosalba. How could you ever talk of *irresistible force*, Doctor?

No criminal premeditation was ever more patient than mine. It was not that he did not deceive me in those long years. I knew how my husband employed his time during the frequent trips he made from the country to the city, but they were vulgar relations with base women, low connections that only lasted a few hours. It was not for these I lay in wait.

Meanwhile, with devout resignation, with strict conscientiousness, firm in my resolution to have nothing to reproach myself with, I strove to conform to all my husband's wishes, to humour his caprices, to aid them with a patience that was almost servile. My father watched me uneasily from his invalid-chair, his eyes gleaming with

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remorse. The poor old man was now aware of the mistake he had made, though no word on the subject had ever passed between us; only, when we were alone, the invalid caressed me as though I were an unhappy child.

Once I heard him murmur:

"I am glad that Anna is dead!" that was all.

By Lodovico's desire our house was transformed; as if by a general and tacit understanding, everybody obeyed him. The servants, with whom he was imperious and harsh, obeyed him; Lorenza, towards whom he showed a sort of insulting indulgence, obeyed him; I, too, obeyed him, readily and silently. My father did not oppose him. One day Lodovico said to me:

"You never read, or write, or think; you are perfectly ignorant."

"It is a fact," I answered, "I never read or write, and I am perfectly ignorant; but I do think."

"And, if I may ask, of what, for Heaven's sake, do you think, you taciturn lady?"

I was mute.

"Of the moon, perhaps," he said angrily.

"Who knows?"

"Caterina, you are monotonous."

"What must I do to please you?" I asked with great humility.

"Why do you dress like an abbess in an historical romance? Do as Lorenza does, be young, wear bright colours."

"I cannot," I answered sadly.

"That is grievance number one. Further, you take no interest in anything; you don't paint, you don't play, you won't even listen to music; you know nothing and nobody; neither Mozart, nor Wagner, nor Beethoven can move you."

"Music hurts me," I confessed.

"That's another grievance! Oh Lord! what airs you give yourself. Do you know what you are? You are hysterical." I looked at him in surprise.

"Certainly, my lady, an hysterical patient of a new kind, tranquil and obstinate, a case to be submitted to medical treatment; a mummy of the soul, a savage who could remain on horseback all day long like a dweller in the desert. Of the artistic soul you have nothing."

"Artistic!" I ventured to say, "that is a very generic word. What do you mean by an artist? One who *believes he creates* or one who *flatters himself that he interprets the so-called creation?* Art appears to me a theft, a plagiarism of truth and beauty. If Art could give us something new! But no, it is so difficult to invent! However original an author may appear, his scenes, his creations, his personages are nothing but the reflections of what he has read, seen, or met."

Lodovico, who had listened to me with astonishment, broke out into one of those laughs that drove the blood back to my heart.

"Listen to this uneducated creature who pretends to give me a lecture on Art! Dante, Raphael, Michelangelo—are nothing! Zero! only

plagiarists! But there, there! you are quite right to hold your tongue."

And he burst into fresh laughter.

"You are a silly woman!"

"I am only an obedient and faithful wife," I replied.

"The more fool you!" cried my husband in sudden anger.

After that he went off and left me. I heard him soon afterwards in Lorenza's room; they were talking and laughing. I heard him ask her in a loud voice for a sonata of Beethoven's, and I heard a few chords struck. Then I rushed up to my own room, put on my black riding-habit, my hat with its waving black plumes, my gloves, and came down again. There was no one in the stables; I took off my gloves, saddled my horse Vizir, who neighed with delight, mounted, crossed the court-yard at a gallop, and dashed forth with loose bridle into the open country, the desert.

Ah, to fly! To live alone in a distant, endless desert—lost, lost for ever!

Indecent pictures, immodest statues, strange furniture, brackets, screens, curious stuffs, china of all lands and kinds, costly glass, carpets that stifled the sound of footsteps, curtains that cast an insupportable gloom and shadow . . . . I no longer recognised my own house. As if to escape the profanation which everywhere surrounded me, I passed through the rooms with closed eyes; I did not wish to speak, did not wish to *see*.

Happy my father, who could not move from his armchair! Happy my infirm father, who passed the whole day in his library and at night was carried up to his bedroom, the only room respected by this crazy modern innovation!

Lodovico often brought strange people with him from the city, who remained to dine with us. Extraordinary men they were, elegantly dressed, who talked of class privileges and cursed them, of the disinherited, and of social reorganisation. We looked at them, my father and I, wondering what they could know about it, what these individuals in tail-coats and pearl-grey gloves could know of the miseries of the lower classes, of the apparent injustice dispensed by Divine Providence, mysterious and all-seeing. And to such as these their oppressed brethren were to trust their fate! The ill-treated populace, the insulted soil, the workmen, in whose hands lay the industrial greatness not of our country alone, but of all humanity!

I never heard them say the word Fatherland, it was always Humanity! They brought it up at every moment and for the most magnificent things; for a "*poor*" child who was contentedly herding geese; for a peasant woman going serenely to the well; a *poor* woman *oppressed* by the necessity . . . . of drinking! for a countryman "*horribly bent*" under a load of hay, of which he was not even thinking.

"There will come a day," said Lodovico, "when the oppressed will rule over their oppressors."

"Then," I hazarded, "things will only be reversed, and the confusion will be still greater."

My husband regarded me compassionately. I was obliged to listen to this sort of talk.

"The finest music is that produced by the combined sounds of the file, the plane, the chisel, and the saw."

But . . . . how about Wagner and Beethoven, for my ignorance of whom I was reproved?

"No spectacle excels in touching grandeur that of a mass of rags spread out in the sun, the many-coloured livery of poverty."

If the spectacle moved them so, why were they so anxious to remove it from the face of the earth? Why did my husband pay such close attention to his property? Why had he not married a peasant girl instead of a rich woman like me?

One evening he introduced his cousin, Gustavo Mariani, to us, and Lorenza immediately fell madly in love with him. Ah, this foolish passion, awakened between a woman whose ideas were bound by a system of superstitious religious terror and a spirit in revolt, exasperated against God and against himself, I never could understand! So long as my father lived Lorenza did not dare to speak. I afterwards learned that she had betrothed herself to him secretly, that she adored Gustavo, and that she would never have forsaken the man who called himself a *mad poet*, an *audacious dreamer*.

Gustavo and Lodovico understood one another. Gustavo, wishing to convert me, once said:

"Signora, we desire nothing but the amelioration of the poorer classes."

"It is not a new idea; Christ himself . . . . ."

"Such an observation, which in you is simply religious, becomes philosophical if we consider Christ as the man who laid the first stone of Socialism."

Horrified at this reply, I looked at Lorenza; she sat with half-closed eyes and a smile on her pale, delicate lips. Had she not understood?

The first stone! Thinking it over I was reminded of Amati's lessons: "Theodolinda laid the first stone," &c.

"Gian Galeazzo laid the first stone." Which? What of? How puerile!

Another time a conversation of this kind was carried on in the presence of my aged father. Gustavo, desirous of showing off, shouted and gesticulated, cited Socrates, Whitman, Bebel, Lassalle. But here came in unexpectedly an interruption from Don Carlo Soave.

"Signor Mariani, quotations are not so effective as you suppose. Often a citation only indicates that some one else has already had the same foolish idea."

I looked at my father with surprise and pleasure. Gustavo was silent, Lorenza turned pale. My husband said nothing; he never dared to contradict his father-in-law. Woe to him if he had!

When I told Lodovico that I was about to become a mother, it seemed to me that our chamber was filled with azure clouds and perfumed with incense, that the place became purified, sanctified. My husband's joy was noisy and boyish, and I took courage to hope.

I understood later that not even the paternal sentiment was strong in that frivolous nature; I understood that not even the birth of our little son Rinaldo had been sufficient to save Lodovico, to save me.

The moment, *that* moment, which could not be avoided, for I had sworn, because it was an unavoidable punishment, a homage to justice, *that* moment, I say, which I saw approaching with terrible clearness year by year, I felt was no longer far distant.

Early one morning, as my little Rinaldo was creeping about the carpet of my room and I was listening to his joyous little cries, like those of some happy wild bird, Lodovico opened the door and stood still for an instant on the threshold watching us. My husband was clad in a fashionable light summer suit and he had already taken his hat, gloves and cane. His fatuous attitude did not deceive me in the least; he was acting; he wished to dawdle a little, to talk to the boy and question me. I noticed his forced smile, his wandering glance; I understood; he was in a hurry to be off, he had one of his adventures on hand.

Why had he married me, this handsome young man, created for the light loves of a day, for fantastic attractions and sinful follies?

"Are you going out, Lodovico?"

"Yes, my dearest."

I was struck by the affected gentleness of his voice. Was there something serious going on this time, then? A real affair, on account of which

some spark of remorse impelled him to affect a false and unusual tenderness ? Ah, if he had but cast aside all deception, if he had but boldly confessed !

" Must you go so early?"

" Most urgent business. I have had the horse harnessed already ; I am going to town."

" Shall you come back to dinner ? "

" Impossible, Kitty ! I am sorry, but it is quite impossible."

" Have you forgotten that you invited Gustavo ? "

" Oh, he is only my cousin ! Besides, you will do the honours of the house, and he will have an opportunity of gazing uninterruptedly at my sister-in-law."

As he said this he bent down to caress Rinaldino. I remained silent, watching him.

" How beautiful he is, the dear pet ! Do you know, little wife, our baby is very pretty. He has all his teeth now, has he not ? Does he sleep well at night ? "

" Yes, he sleeps."

Lodovico came close to me and began to stroke my hair gently, pretending to play with my plaits, which were not yet fastened up, but hung loose over my shoulders.

" This is the hair of a sorceress," he murmured.

Suddenly I sprang up, and, drawing myself up to my full height, I looked at my husband with so resolute an expression that he grew pale.

" What is the matter, Kitty ? "

I could not answer him immediately ; I felt that a great pallor overspread my face, I trembled, and

my lips quivered so that I was incapable of uttering a single word. Then there occurred in me a strange revulsion of feeling, a mixture of anger and surprise, a species of intuition which preceded the certain knowledge of the fact, and without hesitation I judged and condemned.

"Might I ask what it is, Caterina?" he continued, with uneasy impatience.

"It seems to me . . . ." I began, making a vague gesture with my hand as if to indicate something floating in the air around us.

"It seems to you? . . . ."

"No, no!" I exclaimed, approaching him sternly, "it not only seems to me, but I am sure! It is you, is it, who have this perfume about you?"

"What perfume?" he said, instinctively retreating a step and reddening slightly.

Once more, for an instant, I felt a sense of physical weakness; I felt as if I were paralysed, as if my arms hung down at my sides useless and immoveable, I experienced a sensation of weight in the air, as though it were vitiated, contaminated, then a torpor of the brain, and after that a necessity, a fierce necessity of breaking invisible chains that were torturing me.

"What is it?" I asked at last.

"But, good heavens! Is it this poor scent that you object to so strongly? Who could have foreseen such a tragedy? Is there any need to turn pale and tremble in this way? You make me laugh! You want to know what scent it is? I don't even know myself; it is a little bottle that I found in one

of my drawers by chance. Wait, Kitty ! Now I will divulge this tremendous secret ; I think it is . . . . yes, it is white rose ! Are you satisfied now ? "

" White rose ? "

"Or *rosa bianca*, if you like that better."

" Since when have you used this horrid scent ? "

" Oh, I see, you mean that it is a novelty ! You are right, I am using it for the first time to-day. Chance, a mere chance ; I don't care for this sort of thing, but it is a delicious scent all the same. Why do you call it horrid ? You should use it yourself, instead of that everlasting *Russian violet*."

" Never ! "

The antique family lace, that sacred lace which had lain so long in my mother's drawers beside the black cases that contained our splendid family diamonds was always scented with Russian violet ; an odour of violets pervaded the linen which for years and years, according to our provident and simple custom, had accumulated in the large store-cupboards of the house ; when Lorenza, purest of beings, passed through the rooms with her light step, like a spirit, a perfume of violets floated about her, emanating from her snowy garments ; even my baby, through being always with us, carried and caressed, had the same perfume on his soft cheeks and in the brown rings of his curly hair. I thought of all this tenderly, and in disgust exclaimed again impulsively :

" No, never ! "

I understood instinctively that Lodovico, with revolting cynicism, had proposed that I, that I, *his*

wife, should use the perfume of some other woman. Oh, my God! What woman? Some impure creature, doubtless; his mistress for certain.

As I stood motionless, looking at him indignantly, my pupils dilated with horror at the ignoble idea, he had the courage to ask me once again:

"What is the matter?" adding with evident vanity, "You suspect something, perhaps? Are you jealous? tell me, are you jealous?"

"No, no, no!" I answered repeatedly, reflecting on all the vileness of jealousy without love.

"But you are, my dear; so confess it. You are suspicious, and a little jealous. But you are mistaken."

So saying, he approached in order to embrace me, still talking as he did so.

"Jealous, with those wonderful eyes, that imperial mouth, that fairy-like hair! You are joking, are you not? Come, come, a woman as young and beautiful as you are should not be jealous. You should feel quite certain, you see."

Certain!

Oh, I was certain, quite certain; but it was of the deceit which every word of his rendered more vulgar and mean. I could have adduced no proof, yet I was as certain of it as of the existence of God. It seemed as if a well of hatred sprang up in my heart; I scarcely comprehended it, but when, an instant after, Lodovico bent down to kiss my innocent child, to kiss him with lips polluted by sin, I felt certain that I hated him.

I will tell you, I will explain.

You cannot accuse me of exaggeration. Nothing justified the conduct of the man who betrayed me, who lied to me; not passion, as you indulgently call the brutality of the spirit and the senses; remember that before binding himself by an eternal oath he had cynically predicted what would happen, therefore there could be no question of a fatal surprise for him. Yet he dissembled—dissembled with me, lied to me, who without loving him had respected, obeyed, served him, who had subjugated my whole being to a sense of duty to him, constraining my soul, which shuddered, constraining my senses, which rebelled. And he dissembled, lied to me, who had sworn to kill him and whose *duty* it was to kill him. If at least he could have kept silence! If at least he had had the courage to confess!

Confession alone could have saved him. But perhaps he could not keep silence, and the courage to confess was not granted to him. It is impossible to struggle against the *Inevitable*, and in me the consciousness of this inevitableness was so profound that not only was there no struggle, but there was no hesitation from the first conception of the criminal idea until its execution. From that morning I felt that a clearly defined preparation was going forward in my nature, of which I could follow the progress step by step, a steady advance towards the murder, of which I was perfectly conscious, but without horror. No, that which I had to do aroused no feeling of horror in me; that would have been a weakness unworthy of me.

Rather, in awaiting the terrible hour, I felt the peculiar attitude of my mind, which was stoically preparing itself for the deed.

Scarcely was Lodovico gone than I fastened up my hair in feverish haste, took up my boy, carried him out of the polluted chamber and gave him to his nurse. I returned to the room, which seemed impregnated with that accursed scent, and threw wide open the two large windows. Useless, useless! Everywhere, it seemed to me, was the perfume, that perfume of white rose: in the carpet, the furniture, the picture of the Madonna; it had even crept into my hair, into the folds of my dress, into my thoughts, into my heart; it was everywhere! Everywhere was the defiant breath of sin. I changed my dress, rearranged my hair, went down into the garden and wandered out into the country. In vain, in vain!

In vain the harmony of light and colour, the living triumph of the flowers, the golden grain, the impetuous rushing waters, the trilling, humming and warbling of thousands and thousands of winged creatures, visible, or secure in their simple hiding-places; in vain the stretch of emerald meadows, glorious in the sunshine and sweet with the scent of the new-mown grass and all the vitality of Nature in her power. There still remained, dominating everything, the hateful perfume of white rose. My senses were shocked, as if that white rose had turned itself by a horrible miracle into an unbearable colour, an insupportable combination of terrible sounds, an infernal music.

"Are you ill?" asked my father, when I entered his room after an absence of some hours.

"No," I answered, starting.

"You are very pale," said the dear voice, which sounded weaker than usual, and sad, as it had never been before.

"I stayed out too long," I said by way of explanation.

I do not know how long the silence between us lasted.

"Caterina."

"What is it, father dear?"

"Will you read me something?"

"The 'Imitation of Christ.'"

I looked at my father in astonishment; this reading aloud of religious books was in Lorenza's province. But I said nothing; I went immediately to get the book, which my sister kept in the little oratory dedicated to the Madonna. I came back with the little book bound in black morocco.

Don Carlo Soave took the book, placed the marker—a piece of faded pink ribbon—in a certain page and signed to me to read.

It was the chapter "Of the Desire of Eternal Life."

My voice trembled with an unknown emotion. When I had finished I looked at my father; he was weeping.

"This book was Anna's," he murmured, "you will take care of it, *afterwards*."

I understood the significance of that *afterwards*. I kissed the volume, and kissed the trembling hands extended towards me in supreme benediction.

But the thought I was to slay never left me; only I said to myself with calm decision, "Afterwards."

That meant:

"Afterwards when my father shall be dead."

I knew, also, that this *afterwards* would be *soon.*

I am still referring to the same day.

I overheard Gustavo Mariani, on rising from the table, whisper to Lorenza, "Valenti is preparing something tremendous."

"Of what kind?" I inquired indifferently.

"He is the leader of the strike," replied Gustavo.

"What strike?"

"The strike which was feared, at the forge."

"A strike was feared at our forge, you say? Lodovico knew it?" I asked with sudden attention.

"He knew it, certainly, but they were such vague reports!"

"No matter, when there are suspicions of such a nature one does not thus abandon one's house!" I cried indignantly.

"Come, Donna Caterina, calm yourself. It is probably a false alarm; besides, the people must raise its voice freely."

This phrase made me laugh; the occasion made Gustavo's words sound grotesquely rhetorical.

"When your adorable people shall have com-

mitted one of its usual excesses, will you pacify it?" I cried, ironically, to provoke the foolish socialist.

"Why not, Donna Caterina?" he said, reddening with anger.

I saw Lorenza draw near as though to calm me, and I stopped her with a glance.

"In short, what makes you think there is going to be a strike?" I began again.

"I know that the workmen, incited by Valenti. . . . ."

"That vile traitor!"

"Have threatened the manager of the forge."

"Because he was guilty of having obeyed us, guilty of doing his duty, is it not so? And what can they do to him, tell me? Surround him, assault him, destroy his house, which is isolated at the end of the village! How brave! They can frighten him—yes, but that's all! An old man! Ah! how cowardly, how vile! Why do they not come here to me?"

"They say it is useless, that they have already been."

"Two arrogant fellows came with the most ridiculous pretensions: I simply laughed at them. If they have the courage, let them all come; come up here."

"They will come," said Gustavo, quietly.

"Oh, Holy Virgin!" murmured Lorenza.

"Then you are sure of what you say?" I said to Mariani, looking him sharply and closely in the eyes.

He hesitated.

"No, I am not sure."

"And now, after neglecting every means of preventing a revolt, what do you intend to do?"

"Nothing; I am not a proprietor, I have nothing to protect. Whoever has nothing should let matters take their own course; one can never tell what may result from revolution."

At that moment I clearly read the thoughts of Gustavo Mariani; I understood him, and was ashamed to be near such a man.

I went to the pale Lorenza, touched her arm, and flung this reproach at her:

"You hear how he speaks and you are not indignant? Are you, then, no better than Luisa?"

The slender figure trembled convulsively.

"Caterina, Caterina, how cruel you are?" murmured her pale lips.

"If you were in personal danger I would defend you," Gustavo assured us.

My sister smiled affectionately; I smiled too, but with contempt.

"After all, they are but possibilities," said Lorenza in a low voice.

"We shall see," I replied.

I went into the library, to my father. We had been talking together for a few minutes, when our old servant, Giuditta, suddenly threw open the door, exclaiming:

"Oh, Don Carlo! Don Carlo!"

"Here it comes!" I cried, springing to my feet.

"What comes? What is happening?" asked my father, in alarm.

"The strike," I said.

"You know already, Donna Caterina?" gasped Giuditta. "Yes, my son Domenico came up as fast as he could run to warn us. They are the workmen from the forges; they have been playing the devil down there at the end of the village, the manager has fled, they have smashed every window in his house with a shower of stones, they have broken down the door, and thrown out everything they found inside. Something serious is feared; they may come up here perhaps! And then! Oh, Don Carlo, shall I order Andrea to close the great door?"

"No, we are not afraid!" cried my father, making an ineffectual attempt to rise.

"But if they should come here, master? They have threatened us, there is danger. I am afraid for Donna Caterina, for Donna Lorenza, for the child!"

"My God!" exclaimed the poor old man, looking at me with an agonised glance.

Then I saw his venerable face covered with bitter tears, and a wild, miserable rage filled my heart at the thought of my husband who had left us thus, without defence.

"Where is Signor Gustavo?" I asked Giuditta, who was inconsolable.

"He has gone with Domenico to call the carabineers."

"Two hours to go to the village . . . . and return,

two hours before any help can reach us," murmured my father, in despair.

"Oh if only the master had been able to go himself to calm them! They could have been quieted with promises, with kind words, I know they could; Alas for us! Alas for us!"

I was walking up and down in my agitation when a sudden thought struck me, suggested by Giuditta's words. I stopped before my father, as if to fix my resolve.

Hardly had I heard him say regretfully:

"If I only had a son!" when I decided.

"Tell Donna Lorenza to come here immediately," I ordered the old servant. Then, when my father and I were alone:

"Father!" I exclaimed, proudly, "you know I have the courage of a man—you know it—you have given me that courage. Do not distress yourself any more; I will go—shall I?"

He started, he understood. I read in his look—my God, how often since have I seen that look, how often have I recalled it with passionate longing!—a mixture of pride, surprise, paternal enthusiasm that struggled with terror.

"No, Caterina, no!" cried his voice, but his eyes blazed with contradiction.

"You will really go?" he asked presently, as he began to yield, while his eyes were dim with anxiety. "Caterina, will you go alone?"

"Yes, alone."

"It is too much, my brave daughter! No, no!"

"My confidence will calm the rioters."

"And what will you say to them?"

"I do not know, father; God will inspire me."

"You are right, God will protect my child."

We exchanged an intense look, full of religious fervour and steadfast faith, an interchange of confidence.

Lorenza came in, leading the child by the hand.

"Renza," I said, "remain here until my return. You, Rinaldi, be good with grandpapa," I added, without glancing at my son.

"Where are you going?" asked the frightened boy.

I did not answer. I left the library in haste, hurried up to that odious room, full of the perfume of white rose, put on my riding-habit, and went downstairs again. There I had to struggle with Giuditta, who sobbed and implored me not to go, and with Andrea, who refused to help *me* saddle Vizir. When my foot was already in the stirrup I heard Lorenza's faint voice calling me; she came rushing downstairs, sent by my father, who had repented and did not wish me to go.

But the phenomenon of my double personality made it impossible for me to remain. It was no longer in my power to obey, and while my spirit, respectful and devoted, turned at the paternal call, another spirit in me, longing to fight, was already immovable from the idea of finding itself in the midst of the rioters, and constrained me to spur violently forward, abandoning my house and my people.

Now, my second spirit, stronger than the first, though it excited me, also caused me pain. I cannot explain myself clearly, I am afraid ; in short, figure to yourself two personalities fused in each other, yet quite distinct, of which one is inclined to kneel and pray, while the other burns with an imperious desire to discuss, to combat, to command.

In reality I detested these low people who had risen in rebellion, yet they interested me. I longed for once to study them at close quarters, to insult them face to face, to live for one moment the life of these men to whom we had given bread, and who suddenly cursed and threatened us ; I wanted to hear curses and threats that I might smile and defy them. I had no thought of danger ; there seemed an attraction for me in this disorder, this spectacle.

And why, tell me why the air continued to be filled for me with that perfumed malediction which had persecuted me since the morning ? It is of all this I long to convince you—from this point especially I wish to persuade you of even the smallest fact, of every little *item of thought.* From this point—that is to say, from the hour in which I began to feel the physical sensation of the passage of time, as it sped hour by hour, minute by minute.

While Vizir lessened the distance before me, while I felt the sensation of being awaited by those who hated me, as if they already knew of my coming, and while the space between us steadily diminished, there still continued before, behind,

around me a wild dance of millions and millions of white roses, invisible, infernal, heavenly, so fragrant that they made me giddy. They preceded me, they followed me, they drove me mad. Yes, I tell you they were intoxicating, penetrating. Then suddenly, as though their leaves had fallen, I felt myself affronted by a burning rain of petals: there were no roses; they were invisible; why, then, did I feel so distinctly the stinging touch of those soft, snowy, perfumed petals? What torment, what a pitiless persecution!

Vizir leaped over the space before him, on and on; it seemed to me as though the plain fled into the sunset, which was grand, for where the sun had disappeared there remained in the sky great masses of violet clouds and streaks of blood-red colour. It was terrible, awful, but I was not discouraged by it: a secret excitement impelled me towards those who awaited me, who called me. And now I felt most distinctly the sense of a call I must obey.

I met a small group of turbulent workmen, one of whom carried a flag. They stopped for a moment as I passed, mute with astonishment, then turned and followed me, uttering threatening cries. I grew more and more excited, and pulled so hard at Vizir's bit that the poor beast started off at a gallop. The cowardly wretches behind, thinking I was flying, grew furious. A stone! ah, Heaven! No, nothing; I am safe, Vizir is safe. Another stone! Still unhurt. Ah, at last! Here are the rest—no, only a group of them. Further on I hear cries; there is the crowd of strikers. Courage, Vizir! Those

who were following me shouted with savage delight :

"Here she is, she has fallen into our hands ! We'll eat her up alive ! "

I had reached the cross roads. I could change my course, could fly as they believed and feared I should do. On, Vizir, on, towards the others, to where they are, all of them, where I am awaited, where I mean to go ! Long live my father, Don Carlo Soave ! He is right, long may he live ! *We are not afraid.*

Behind me I heard shouts and laughter.

" Look at her ! She leads the way ; she defies us ! Much she has to defy ! Hurrah, hurrah, the brave lady ! It is our turn now ; forward the mob ! Down with the rich ! Down with the oppressors ! Death to the owners ! Come to us, dear ; come to us ! We'll tame you finely ! The Austrians left you here ! The Germans have not all gone ! A clear understanding now, or you'll never get home alive, girl ! "

I hear you, vile crew ! And one must make concessions to this gang of thieves.

" Oh, oh ! Here's the Countess Matilda come to fight us ! Where is Gregory VII. ? "

With this ridiculous historical allusion my brother-in-law Antonio checked Vizir's wild course. I recognised his voice immediately. Trembling with hatred, I bent down to him and asked :

" Are you the leader of this pack of fools ? "

" Softly, fair lady ! Don't give yourself such airs ! It's useless to raise your whip ; I have

your beast by the bridle. Now, let us come to terms! That's what you came for, isn't it?"

Oh, the fury, the insane fury that the sight of him aroused in me! The villain's face that had made us all blush with shame; the man who had seduced Luisa; who had caused me to make my first grim acquaintance with hatred! Oh, how I detested him; how willingly could I have scarred his face if I had not foreseen the consequences, for I did not forget it was Lodovico whom I had to kill! Now that I saw them, I was moved by infinite pity (physical, not moral) for these plebeians who surrounded me; imploring rather than greedy, deceived rather than corrupt. These people, these furious people, I had known them once, in other days, as they ought to have remained—humble, devoted, and servile. Yes, they were devoted then, these men.

Oh, Antonio Valenti; wretch, wretch! What poison had you instilled in their hearts? What words, oh apostle of evil! had you used against God and their legitimate masters to exasperate them to this revolt; so unjust, so vile as to awake positive horror?

"What is it you want?" I asked in a loud voice.

"Shorter working hours!"

"Higher pay!"

"Better treatment!"

They were furious voices, raised as though in blasphemy.

"Shall we come and work for you?" I cried ironically.

"She refuses! Refuses!" I heard screamed in threatening female tones.

Women too. My God, Thou wast merciful to me, for amongst these voices it was impossible for me to distinguish Luisa's. Perhaps she was not there. God help me to believe that she was not!

"Send them home; send them all home!" I called out to Valenti. Even while he made a movement as if to seize me, I heard several voices crying:

"The carabineers! The carabineers!"

"But you, viper, are you going to make concessions to those who serve you?" asked Antonio, fixing me with his bloodshot eyes.

"Justice, and nothing more."

"What? What?"

"Justice," I cried. "Go home, you women, go home; take you husbands home if you would not have worse things happen!"

By this time the carabineers were close upon us. Then I saw the worth of popular fury, the just anger of the people, in the face of force. Valenti left hold of Vizir's bridle, shouting at me I know not what threat. The others began to consult amongst themselves, uncertain, casting suspicious looks at Antonio; some dispersed quietly, others started to run across the fields. A few stones came flying through the air in my direction, thrown by some miserable, unknown hand. I started Vizir off at a gallop again. The brigadier who

commanded the detachment of mounted carabineers met me, pale and serious.

"What imprudence! Oh lady, what imprudence! You will not go back alone!"

I smiled. I was obliged to return home escorted by two carabineers, and on the way the roses came back and surrounded me—the white roses with falling leaves, turning into a white shower of petals, delicate scorching petals.

I found Lorenza waiting for me in the court-yard, talking in low tones to Gustavo.

I was instantly seized by the thought of my father left all alone; instantly I saw him, lying in his chair, his head resting against its back, with wide-open, staring eyes, dull eyes, dull and glassy, with the last longing look, his features composed in the austere and rigid gravity of death. I know not what delirium seized me; scarcely had I dismounted when I screamed to Lorenza:

"You have let our father die! You have let him die alone!"

I heard a cry of terror as I hastened thither, where, in fact, he was awaiting me, as I had seen him in that terrible vision of presentiment.

My child had fallen gently asleep on his knee. For many hours I remained with him, with the beloved dead; then I left Lorenza and Giuditta to pray in the chamber where the dear body reposed, calm, for ever calm, illuminated by many tapers burning in melancholy splendour. I had not wept; I could not; I felt it was impossible for me to weep.

I went down to the courtyard; a small table, with a lamp on it, had been placed under the portico, as the carabineers were staying all night, fearing further disorder. Andrea, our old servant, was sitting at the table with his elbows resting upon it, sobbing, with his face hidden in his hands.

I approached him gently and laid my hand on his shoulder.

"Go upstairs, Andrea; go and see him. He looks as though he were sleeping."

The old man obeyed.

To the carabineers, three young men, who gazed at me steadily in silence, with respectful sympathy, I said:

"I do not wish my husband to hear anything until I have spoken to him; neither do I wish him to see you at once."

They retired into a corner of the courtyard where not even the moonlight reached them. It was late; the night was calm, silent and beautiful; the cold stars shone in the dark-blue vault above, the full moon with her pearly halo rode imperiously on high. I did not pray, everything around me seemed to be interceding for me; the nocturnal silence was a devotion; all things prayed in a silence blessed and sanctified by death; a thought of eternity was born, extended, and hovered over all things, in all things.

I remained there long, waiting to destroy at one blow the vanity of the man who should arrive, to see his face change at the sudden and terrible news, to throw down at one blow his whole edifice of lies.

A few minutes before Lodovico arrived I remembered that Gustavo Mariani might anticipate me. If he were already warned, if it were no longer in my power to take him by surprise!

And in fact it was so, he had already been told everything.

When I saw his face in the light of the small lamp burning under the portico it was not pale with pity, it bore no look of sorrow, I saw a face flushed with anger, contracted with a thousand evil thoughts.

"Come upstairs!" he said roughly.

I followed him, desirous of remaining—until the end—faithful to my duty as an obedient wife. It was in the room he had contaminated that very morning that the odious event occurred. And now listen to what happened. I was with my husband, and yet was not with him. In spirit I was in the chamber of the dear departed, in truth I was really there beside the bed whereon lay the motionless figure; Lorenza, Giuditta, and I were reciting the same Latin prayer together, it was the *Pater noster*. My body was beside my husband, my ears heard his angry and insulting words; who knows how often I had heard them before, how often I had been obliged to answer them? But now I could make no reply, for my lips were engaged in prayer, there, beside the dead, my lips were forced piously to repeat, "*Deliver us from temptation, now, and in the hour of our death.*"

Suddenly the delight and the torture of this double existence, this double and imperfect vitality

was brutally interrupted; I felt myself seized by the arm, my soul was recalled to my body with vigorous force, I ceased praying; I heard the words:

"I forgive you the ridiculous folly of to-day for the sake of what happened afterwards."

I uttered an indignant cry, then I was able to speak, to question him.

"And you who assure me, are you at peace? Are you satisfied with what you have done to-day?"

I never saw any one else turn so horribly pale. I heard him lie again, I heard myself laughing, laughing long. Perhaps he spoke again; my body remained beside him certainly, but I could neither listen to him nor answer him. My soul had gone back to pray by my father's bedside; we three women were there, praying fervently, and the tapers burned, burned, and the flickering flames prayed also. My father was at rest. *He*, that man, was still talking, perhaps.

Lorenza had fainted; Giuditta and I had searched in vain for the bottle of ether—where could it be? It must have been fate that put into Giuditta's mouth the words which led me to the discovery, no, to the certainty, of what had troubled my mind for months and months.

"Donna Caterina, perhaps it is in master's room."

"Impossible, why should you suppose master would keep ether in his room?"

"But, who knows! I thought it might, perhaps,

be amongst the bottles on the shelf by the window. Andrea may have found the bottle we are looking for by chance, and put it there amongst the others."

I hesitated. Should I go into Lodovico's room? Should I call Andrea and order him to search? I never entered that room where voluptuous luxury reigned, and even the necessity of the moment did not suffice to overcome my repugnance to a place so opposed to all my tastes and ideas.

Meanwhile Giuditta bathed my sister's forehead with a handkerchief dipped in vinegar, moistening her temples delicately, and speaking softly and affectionately, as one does to a sick child. Lorenza was still unconscious. I can still see the girl's corpse-like face, surrounded by the pale aureole of her fair hair. Nothing about her revealed a sign of life, but still I could not move, I could not decide.

"She is coming to!" cried the good old servant —but it was not true, the swoon did not pass. "Oh, Signora, Signora, I am afraid! I must call some one, I must make her swallow something strong . . . ."

"Brandy," I said, hoping it might suffice. I went to my wardrobe, took the bottle of brandy and poured a few drops on Lorenza's lips, as we could not open her mouth. But with no result.

"We must have the ether," said the servant, turning round in despair, "go, Signora, go yourself into master's room, I will stay here with Donna Lorenza and keep her head raised."

"I will go," I answered faintly.

And I went.

I am not observant, I am not even curious; the secret thoughts of others do not interest me; I do not care about the objects that surround me, but often, suddeny, as if by a revelation, there has been borne in on me by outward things the exact picture of a soul. I now saw the soul of my husband, my absent husband was there, present all around me, and I beheld his soul, pensonified as it were, laughing at me in everything. I see it still, I feel it, the nausea of that moment comes back to me. I see myself walking with steps rendered noiseless by the soft carpet, walking in the dim twilight produced by the short silken curtains of the windows, a bluish twilight enhanced by the reflection of the blue curtains and the smoke of the cigarettes. What a place it was, noisome with strange perfumes, with the smell of flowers dying in the large porcelain vases!

Doctor, let me hasten on, let me tell you the end quickly. No, do not force me to dwell on details.

There . . . .

There . . . . Where?

On the shelf, was it not? Certainly. On the small shelf near the window. Well, the bottle of ether was not there. The letter was there instead.

Which?

That letter! The letter that *had* to be there.

I am writing from memory; you know the letter already, it was read at the trial; never mind, Doctor, let me write it down from memory; the letter said:

"DEAR HEART,

"The sovereign speaks, the happy slave obeys. Here I am at the 'Refuge,' as you wished; here I am, not far away from you, exulting in the thought that I can see you every evening, as you promised, that I can steal you every evening from *her* whom I hate and whom you do not love. Tell me that you have never loved her! Tell me this, Lodovico, tell it me between the kisses of our great passion.

"Is it not true, oh my own, that I am thine, wholly thine?

"As for *him*, who is now far away, I care nothing! If you were jealous of him you would be mistaken—you, my adored one, you who have seen me smile proudly at the idea of danger.

"Our love a sin?

"It cannot be, oh my lover, and if it were, then I should even bless sin!

"I have left the child with my mother-in-law and have come here, they think, because I am ill and tired.

"Are you smiling, you of whom I think constantly? You know it is so, I am ill with love and tired of everything that does not concern you.

"I press my mouth to yours . . . .

"YOUR SARA."

He . . . . She?

I know. Myself and Sara's husband. I must insist on the fact that I felt no rancour towards Lodovico's mistress; on the contrary, I included her in the same compassion I felt for myself. Was

she not unhappy in loving a man like Lodovico Rosalba, a man base enough to allow his mistress to insult a wife like me!

She . . . .

He . . . .

Do you remember that other person who was wronged as I was? I remember his loyal look, which was in itself a reproof; you do not believe it, perhaps. That other person had the soul of those who pardon the fault while suffering from it and feeling its disgrace. He would have been grateful to me if I had killed Sara, for I should thus have saved him the open shame of forgiveness.

But, I repeat, I did not hate Sara, and the idea of making myself the instrument of justice on behalf of others has always been repugnant to me.

How long I remained with my eyes fixed upon that letter that commanded me to punish I do not know, but my sensations were terrible, because I was fully aware that time was rushing towards the *fore-ordained.*

I heard Lorenza's voice:

"Dear Caterina, do not search any longer, I am better."

I turned; the pale girl was standing upright on the threshold, leaning on the smiling Giuditta.

I laid the letter down on the shelf, there where my husband's tranquil imprudence had left it that very morning, and went to my sister, whose gentle eyes were turned towards me. In truth, no one noticed any change in my expression; on my cheek appeared no flush of indignation, no pallor of horror

at the revelation. Nothing new had happened, only the continuation drew near, the *continuation* that was to lead to the *end.*

Talking with Lorenza, smiling at Rinaldo, going about the house, giving the usual orders to the servants, I was *preparing myself* for . . . .

You understand ?

Now, when there remains very little more to tell you, I have no strength to explain ; no physical strength. Do you understand this, too ?

Lodovico did not come back at dinner-time. I remember that the room on the ground-floor, with the table richly laid, seemed to me gloomy in the sunset-light ; my mourning dress felt too heavy for my frame, which was tormented by some unknown malady.

A year had not yet passed since my father's death.

Wait, I remember something else ; as I sat in my accustomed place the door opened to admit Lorenza, another black figure, a shadow, with a white face and a pale gold head. Did not the black dress weigh on her too ? Was it not, for her also, a thorn, a nail, a scourge ? Did she not feel it cling about her like a material, suffocating menace ?

Yet another point ; beside me stood the child, laughing with wide-open mouth, a fresh rosy flower.

And now, Doctor, guess what was the last detail of the scene, the detail which I retain clearly fixed in my memory, but which I cannot describe to you, *the empty place*, the place which was to remain empty for ever.

A few hours yet, ... you comprehend?

The few hours, during which I heard *his* voice whisper to *another* those lying phrases that my ears knew so well.

I swear to you, for the last time, it was not jealousy that made me shudder. Jealousy, no; horror rather.

A few hours yet . . . .

But one little hour remained for *him* to live, when, ready to depart, I turned instinctively to the mirror—an extraordinary thing for me to do, who hate mirrors as I hate photographs. I never see *myself* reflected in the smooth surface, but *another;* a derisive personage, with gloomy eyes and a strange, wild smile. That time, looking in the glass, forcing myself to smile, I felt afraid of that other, who had a burning glance and teeth of odious whiteness. No, no; that cruel face could not be mine! It was the *other*, whose eyes were aflame, whose smile was murderous, and whose lips were parted with a savage joy.

The *other*. Who?

Then there began a clearly defined dualism in which I calmly took part; two silent voices uplifted themselves in my spirit. I was as if divided into two mysterious personalities; the first commanded imperiously, the second obeyed readily.

Thus spoke the *first:*

"Go to the wardrobe with the secret springs, touch that of the third drawer on the right, and you will find . . . ."

Here the mysterious voice paused in fear,

then added in a tone of brutal command, "Take it!"

The *second* went to the wardrobe, opened it, touched the spring of the third drawer to the right, then, shuddering, hesitated, and finally resolutely *took* . . . .

Andrea had already harnessed the horse to my little carriage, which stood ready for me in the courtyard, over which the gathering dusk had spread a soft, poetic cloud.

I sprang lightly into the carriage, took the reins, and cracked the little whip, that hissed through the air like a sarcasm. Before I passed through the entrance-gate I heard the farewells.

"A pleasant drive to you, Caterina!"

"Good-bye, mamma!"

My sister and the boy; they thought I was going out for my usual solitary after-dinner drive.

I left the village behind me. The country through which I drove was dark; the carriage lamps looked like blood-shot eyes. Passing by the cemetery, I—who was bent on an errand of murder—thought of death with serenity, as of the most just and natural attribute of humanity.

I knew the "Refuge." It was a villa in the neighbouring village of Roccalta, a beautiful isolated house near the Wood of the Cross, as the peasants call it.

The little carriage rolled past another small and silent cemetery, in which were millions of fire-flies that looked like wandering stars. Again I medi-

tated on the just mystery of death, with the most tranquil serenity.

The " Refuge."

I pulled up my swift horse; it was, as usual, Vizir, who could not forget the free gallops of other days. I got out of the carriage and tied the reins to a tree.

Perfectly calm, I went up to the gate of the villa, which was closed; I passed through it and entered the avenue that led on to a flight of stone steps. Absolute silence reigned; even the two mysterious voices within me were quiet at last.

No one in the avenue, no one in the dimly-lighted entrance hall. It was the very abode of secret love.

In my right hand I held the revolver I had taken from the drawer in the wardrobe—at a command inexplicable, but expected and inevitable.

A door which led into a lighted room, a small drawing-room, was open before me; I went forward. Turned towards the door, lying back in a lounging-chair, was a woman; I could plainly see her splendid bust and her magnificent blond head; at her feet, resting his head upon her knees, with his back turned towards me, was my husband. You see, therefore, that all was ready, that all was waiting for me.

And scarcely had I entered, when I felt myself assailed by the familiar and insulting perfume of white rose; wherefore my hand did not tremble, but struck the blow at once and suddenly. I shot Lodovico in the back of his neck, where traitors are shot.

I saw my husband's head drop instantaneously, then slide across the knees of the woman, who rose up, shrieking with terror; I saw my husband's body fall prostrate, face downwards, to the ground. I let the woman escape, while I went up to that ghastly corpse and turned its face towards me, fearing it might not be dead.

A thousand times over I would have killed him.

But now all was finished. I turned my back on the dead man, and went alone, spontaneously, to give myself up to human justice.

Now *you know.*

Doctor, believe me. You should have allowed me to be condemned; I ought to have been condemned to the utmost penalty of the law.

Now . . . . oh, now! I do not know remorse, and why should I feel it? But I can no longer look upon my son.

Because of his eyes.

Because of his eyes, which cannot be child-like, which cannot be serene, for they resemble the eyes of the man I killed.

PART II

THE SOULS

The Idolater must perish, struck down by his own Idol.

PART II

THE SOULS

Some characteristic thoughts extracted from a journal of Gustavo Mariani's:

"I consider that he who is contented with everything suffers from the *torpor of life*, and he who despises everything has its *poison*. To despise is at least the exasperation caused by regret; it is better to be indifferent.

"She loves me, without cause; the fact humiliates me. Woe to me were she to reason about it! Still, it would please me to give life to this woman's brain, it would please me to elevate in her to the virtue of love that which men have defined as sin and remorse.

"Looking at her, I often note a curious psychological fact; the absence of soul. I then consider her, not as a woman, but as a cold and perfect work of art.

"It is better so, better this profound ignorance. An intelligent Lorenza might become odious to me.

"*I do not know what I am, nor do I comprehend well what I should be.* This is what constitutes all the adorable ingenuousness of the corruption of a

Manon Lescaut. I do not love mercenary courtesans; they do not know how to abandon themselves, they do not give themselves. They concede themselves with fastidious self-consciousness, with a fatal predominance of brain that destroys every impulse of the soul and even every sensual desire. Manon Lescaut arouses astonishment, the good simple creature who so ingenuously dishonours her family, so disinterestedly ruins her lovers, and deceives them with such candour. Of her, not of the sentimental female philosopher, the friend of St. Preux, it should be said:

"I love a woman who is ignorant, but also subtle by aristocratic instinct."

Long afterwards Donna Lorenza remembered that morning.

It had been a morning of great religious fervour. As a matter of fact, it would be incorrect to say that Lorenza prayed, rather she remained for long hours on her knees, *listening to God:* rarely did she dare to *talk with Him.* It was not that she lacked the capacity, she disdained it, disdained with deep-rooted instinct any knowledge that might have offended her childish creed, or offended her senses, which were so pure that one might deem them deficient. Lorenza arrested herself by impulse, assisted by a want of natural curiosity, and by pronounced contempt for speech. She might have known and understood, but she did not try. She was tranquil with others and tranquil in herself.

It was the same with her God. She felt Him

and thought of Him more than she invoked Him. He could read her soul all the same, and would find there a great material peace, a divine elevation of thought, free from every earthly tie.

Later, much later, Donna Lorenza, who never recalled anything, had a confused and sudden delirium of remembrance, and amongst these indistinct recollections arose the exact vision of that morning. It seemed to her that she was present at something biblical and prophetic.

Slowly and invidiously fell the rain, creating the grey colour that predominated in the little oratory; in the gloom the dull gilding of the small altar gave out faint reflections like the pale gold of Lorenza's hair. A melancholy perfume of invisible flowers, which came from the dark niche where stood Santa Lucia, filled the air, it was not possible to see the saint, but she could be divined through the darkness; there was, besides, an odour of incense, sweet and intermittent.

Lorenza was kneeling at the foot of the crucifix. The rain, which she did not hear at the time, in later days was tiresomely insistent in its continuity; as is often the case with memory, things unnoticed at the time avenge themselves by reappearing in sharp outline, a futile offering, as it were, to later contemplation. Those shadowy objects, sacred and sad!

Accidentally the waxen hands had opened a volume of *Paillettes d'Or*, turning the pages carelessly, when the pure eyes fell casually on the sentence:

"*Idolâtre doit périr frappé par son idole.*"

The girl ceased reading and trembled.

She remained immovable a few minutes longer, and then rose, as if to escape from the fear aroused by a warning. She trimmed the lights on the altar, and stretched her hands out confidently into the darkness in search of the flowers that were fading in the niche, which already gave forth a dying perfume.

Turning towards the crucifix and seeing once more the open volume on the reading desk, Lorenza involuntarily saw the sentence, and again she trembled.

Then, a mystic white figure, but with an ardour that was almost human, she raised herself to her full height, stretched out her arms and embraced the huge crucifix, laying her sad virginal head beside the drooping, suffering one of the sublime, misunderstood One, saying to Him, in the ecstatic style habitual to her when she ventured to speak:

"My Lord, oh my Lord, Unique and Supreme Good, pardon me! Pardon me! I love one of Thy creations too well.

"It is thus, it is thus!"

Under her breath Lorenza murmured:

"One must not love the flesh, I know. My God, my God, true Love that cannot deceive, by the Divinity of Thy Being purge this idol from out my heart and pardon thy unworthy servant."

And then Lorenza fainted.

That was the evening Caterina killed Lodovico.

Such was the vision.

The trial was an eternity of suffering. Oh, the

hours of anguish passed with Rinaldo, a silent and precocious child, able to guess even the meaning of silence! The despairing talks with Luisa, who came to meet her sister, through the fields, as far as the garden gate, but who would not enter the house!

She who had been a rebellious girl had become a miserable woman, suffering hopelessly and incessantly; her poor face worn thin with sorrow, her hair turned grey, her once vigorous figure bowed with humiliation; only in her eyes still burned the fire of her old rebellious spirit.

The two sisters met without an embrace, without a kiss; they looked into each other's eyes with sadness, and walked on side by side. Lorenza was not given to demonstrations of affection, and Luisa, overcome now by her scruples, was restrained by fear of profanation.

Only Luisa spoke.

"Pray, Lorenza, pray you, who are innocent; only your prayers and those of my son Vincenzo can save us. We are all guilty except you, for you are purity itself."

Lorenza was silent. The repentant sister continued:

"Have you no horror of me? Do you forgive me?"

The other shook her head at the word horror, and gave a sign of assent at that of pardon, smiling sweetly.

"What good you do me, dear! You love me! Caterina does not; Caterina loves neither you nor me."

"Do not accuse her!" begged Lorenza several times.

"I do not accuse, but I remember and note. You are better than we are . . . ."

The pure young sister did not deny this assertion, for she nourished in her soul the cold and self-conscious pride of religious natures.

"Yet I hope she will be acquitted."

"Is there any hope?" asked Lorenza's eyes.

"Yes," replied Luisa, "I have spoken to the lawyer and I have spoken to Dr. Alvise."

Lorenza's eyes grew clouded; Luisa interpreted the sign.

"You doubt it, sister; so do I. This pretence of madness weighs on me. Caterina is not mad, she is proud. She and I were both indomitably proud, a different form of pride certainly, but Lucifer has always ruled us both. I wish I knew if she is cast down as I am; perhaps not. She and I have ruined the family; she did not defend me, but I forgive her. We must defend her, save her, she is our sister; you will, will you not?"

Lorenza shuddered at the thought of a falsehood, but her spirit inclined to illimitable pardon; not the sins of others horrified her, but the possibility of an inevitable sin of her own.

"When Caterina is acquitted we must persuade her to go away. It will be difficult to induce her to move. Time will pass, and in a very few years I hope Gustavo will marry you."

A faint tinge of rose-colours spread over the face of the mystic.

"Do you think he will marry you?"

Lorenza trembled and grew pale again.

"He never speaks to you of marriage, does he? But he loves you; he is an honest man, he will marry you for the sake of your purity. You will be happy, for God is just. God bless you and your children!"

What long silences fell between one sentence and another! It seemed as though the persons of whom they spoke were already phantoms, like the memory of the murdered man, and that their shadows slowly followed the steps of the repentant woman and the frightened girl.

"*He* never appears to you? The dead man, I mean."

Lorenza would not hear this mentioned. She said, in a low voice:

"Hush, hush!"

Then they separated at the end of the village. Luisa had to bear the cross she had laid upon herself. Lorenza bore the heavy cross imposed by the Divine Will; and down there, in the prison, Donna Caterina Soave neither prayed nor hoped, did not even think, but waited with proud fatalism.

For the first time Lorenza ran to meet her *idol;* he embraced her, drawing her into his eager arms, and she, for the first time, allowed herself to be kissed on the lips. Then in the mind of Gustavo was born a singular regret, a secret and unconfessed exasperation; it seemed to him that doubt, humiliation, the discouragement of defeat, a burn-

ing humiliation, would be preferable to the triumph of possession.

A strange thing this certain vision of possession in a near future, nor could he have explained how he was able to divine it intuitively in the seraphic grace of the girl's momentary abandonment of herself. Her slender arms were gently laid around his neck, her pallid lips had yielded for an instant to the contact with those she so dearly loved . . . . a timid bond, a timid concession, but, nevertheless, all interest had already ceased and nothing remained for him but a tiresome dread of what was to come. This dread was truly monstrous and selfish, considering the moment and considering the long desire that had preceded it. And how, all at once, had all uncertainty come to an end? And why did he suddenly credit this mystic creature with the courage of surrendering herself? Did he not love her, did he not respect her?

Perhaps the long waiting had worn out the idea of future pleasure, perhaps he had loved her too long in dreams, and while she related to him how Caterina was acquitted, pouring out a stream of excited words, as though intoxicated by her unusual eloquence, trembling with joy, chattering like a child, Gustavo wondered at himself that he did not draw her once again to his breast, that he could not find a single word of love. Had he exhausted them all? But when, how? Yes, all, in dreams, in a prolonged dream from the first moment. Thus the imagination had been powerful enough to destroy all real enjoyment, every really possible

thing had become tasteless and useless, things dead and ended, nor was there even a desire for their resuscitation.

Through how many phases that imaginary love had passed! He had been able to live upon it for so many years, assailed by gusts of passion, swayed by barren thoughts of material interest, by motives of over-mastering curiosity, of profound discouragement, of yearning after the impossible. It was as though, with an intensity both brutal and tender, he had, in Lorenza, loved various personalities; the creature of his youthful dreams, the rich girl, the sweet mystic, the poor deserted soul, and the woman from whom he was separated by innumerable barriers.

Lorenza continued talking, talking incessantly, intoxicated with her own words, as sometimes happens to the timid when they abandon their habitual reserve.

And Gustavo remembered with dry distinctness what had been to him a confused joy, his soul's deep delight; he remembered that his very sufferings had also been dear to him, he had the clear consciousness that he had enjoyed even bitter humiliations. He had joyfully borne even insults for her, for her! How cruel Donna Caterina had always been! How terrible the silent, latent scorn of Don Carlo Soave!

Here he recalled the words of Lodovico Rosalba, his lively cousin, weary of his matrimonial chains:

"Be patient, Gustavo, the old man cannot live long, and then you can marry my litttle sister-in-law."

They returned to his mind, and now, after the tragic end, they seemed even more vulgar still.

And Don Carlo Soave had died, and soon afterwards Lodovico had died too. Died murdered. These things had been tremendous barriers, all of them.

Had they perhaps dismayed him? Had they not inspired him with a bitter longing to triumph? A raging desire for victory was united to furious anger against fate; it seemed as though he had engaged in a sordid struggle with occult powers, and, curiously enough, vanity was the outcome of this incessant struggle.

He had never spoken to her of love; he knew he was beloved, knew that she had loved him from the very first.

Until the death of Don Carlo Soave he had desired her as one desires and waits for a gentle girl to whom one is betrothed, watching her move about with dreamy slowness, hearing but rarely her low and gentle voice, looking for her smile, that was so sweet as to be almost sad. In thought he had spoken to her, invoking her, like a mystic spouse. Then, while waiting for the expiration of the term of mourning, there had occurred the terrible event which had destroyed for ever all hope of marriage.

Never, never would he connect himself with a woman like Caterina. Every theory fell prostrate before the indelible fact of that murder; the indulgence of the judges availed not, the excuse of madness availed not, even interest was not able to

overcome the repulsion with which the idea of a connection with the Soave family inspired him.

And Lorenza was innocent, ... no, not even that availed.

Nor had the suspense ceased; it had only changed its character.

It was no longer desire; Gustavo longed for Lorenza, longed for her ardently, as a lover may, as one may long for a woman who is already won, and the whole period of Caterina's trial was for Gustavo an interval of passion, in which the figure of Lorenza appeared to him no longer as in the faint clouds of a dream, but as an actual person, and, still more brutally, as one who had belonged to him a long time, bound to him by right and habit. Ah, if Lorenza could have read the troubled thoughts of the man she loved! It would have seemed to her as though her soul was plunged into a cruel nightmare. But Lorenza was absorbed in herself, and her visions, chaste and unchangeable, never revealed to her aught but a symbolical white bridal robe and the snowy folds of a wedding veil. When Luisa interrogated her, with the latent doubts of a soul inured to the realities of life, the girl trembled. But it was only a fleeting impression speedily dispelled by a return of blind faith.

It is truly a mystery, this powerful faith in a beloved person. Lorenza believed in Gustavo with an ironical and impulsive feeling of security; there was actually a confusion in her mind between the love for God and the love for man; to her they

were both beliefs that had no need of material aid, triumphing over silence and absence. Gustavo's watchful love, which had never been revealed in words, resembled the indefinite joys of which the Church speaks, as the faithful promise of an invisible Divinity. Beside him who despoiled her of all chastity, who offended her cruelly, though tacitly, in the most brutal manner, Lorenza, the virgin no longer in her first youth, but who in thought had remained a child, believing marriage to be a simple union of souls, though yearning with vague longings for the joys of motherhood. Into this dream within a dream she had thrown so much ingenuous passion that to her everything seemed to be arranged. She cherished her vision so long that a declaration of love, a demand in marriage, would have seemed useless and would have surprised her. Wherefore, in her adorable certainty, in her unhappy illusion, it was she who said with girlish impulsiveness:

"Caterina is acquitted, you can marry me! We will go away, far away, wherever you like, and we shall be so happy!"

How did the idea of the last comedy flash through his mind, as Lorenza, tired after her long speech, approached to lean her head upon his shoulder?

The last comedy, or was it not rather the last act of one long comedy? He beheld the whole ardour of its action, with the clearness of a thing long pondered, imagining he had suddenly become an actor, while in reality he only needed to finish a

part in which he had shown himself a patient and true histrionic.

In a tone of supreme discouragement Gustavo replied to Lorenza:

"A delusion, my poor darling, it is impossible, impossible."

The fair head, which had bowed itself on his shoulder as it bowed itself in religious meditation, was raised, and he could see in her face, could read in her eyes, that he had struck her to the heart. But the pallor of that face, the light of those eyes so full of love and terror, did not fill him with the infinite pity the sufferings of those we truly love arouse in us. He rather felt a sharp impatience, a strong desire to hurry, to make an end of it.

Ah, while he was speaking, passing his sacrilegious hands over her sweet face, reciting to that suffering countenance a cold sentence of death, what did he not observe? He noticed the hair, with its pale golden tint, already beginning to grow thin about the pure brow, on the temples and round the ears, which anæmia made transparent and waxen; the lips, too, pale, of a hue like withered roses; the veins which showed plainly in an intricate net of sickly blue; the lack-lustre eyes, which seemed sick with nostalgia for the sun. Nothing escaped him; he examined her, judged her, sickly, no longer young, a vanquished, exhausted creature, and he already felt a physical repulsion, a dread of disgust, at the thought of embracing that thin frame whose shoulders had no

softness of outline, whose elbows were sharp, and whose bosom he divined would be the poor tortured bosom of a mature virgin. He wondered that he had even longed after her. Perhaps he had still continued to see her as she was when first they met, slight but graceful, perhaps the havoc wrought by time had been so gradual that he had not noticed it. But now the evidence of this natural but cruel change was odious and insupportable to him.

The touch of the poor thin clammy hands, the lips that no longer tempted love, the too slender waist that seemed as if it were bending, breaking—no, no, he wished for her no longer, he would have none of her. No, he did not want her, and skilfully, with a slowness that was a positive pain to him by reason of his profound and increasing disgust, Gustavo put Lorenza aside, put her away gradually with visible respect, as if recalling her to her former reserved attitude, and dryly and firmly repulsed her.

Lorenza stood immovable in pained astonishment. Had she been the only one who loved? Had she deceived herself? Had she mistaken a simple fraternal tenderness for love? And was Gustavo's constancy, friendship, only friendship? And she had thrown her arms around his neck, had kissed him on the mouth, she herself had offered herself to him! It was a Divine punishment, she felt it must be so, she was sure of it! She ought to have belonged to God; to God, who had shown her the fleeting nature of man's love.

Had she not witnessed Luisa's punishment? Had she not seen Caterina, the person so faithful to duty, the woman so rigidly honest, the impeccable *par excellence*, descend even to crime in exasperation at a man's falsehood? She should have given herself to God.

And yet . . . . Gustavo had embraced her, had kissed her, it seemed to her, ever, that he had clasped her with loving arms, and that his lips had been pressed on hers with an ardour that had shaken her through and through.

Yes, yes. And now, it was not of friendship, not of brotherly affection that he spoke. Why, then, such coldness in his eyes? Why such composure in his gestures? Why had his voice, which had been sad, grown so hard, as though contradicting the gentleness of his words?

"Lorenza, it is not possible. I tell you this with all the grief of a decisive moment; I tell it you in sacred seriousness, as a dying man might speak. Yes, you have divined, I have long loved you, I love you even now, when we must part for ever. . . . . Do not turn pale, I implore you! You should understand, be calm, be resigned; you should be strong, for you are purity itself, and have the light of faith in you. I would have abjured all my views, all, and you know what those views are. I am a socialist, and free love alone seems to me just and perfect. Free love, do you understand, dear saint? Without a priest, without legal formula. It makes you shudder, does it not? I see you do not admit,

do not know such a thing, divine innocent that you are! For your sake I would have forgotten everything, I would have married you, but the crime has made even this impossible. When we resolve to follow the ways of other men we accept all their prejudices; we marry a woman, and marry the obscure ideas of centuries. Think of it! It is cruel, but just, according to your own ideas, according to your own scruples. Caterina killed my cousin Lodovico, I can no longer marry you; the dead man stands between us. Do you understand, my poor martyr?"

Without doubt the crown of martyrdom, the Christian crown of thorns, was being laid upon the head of the poor little being, who let her arms fall heavily by her sides, assenting to, and accepting the chastisement.

"Dear Lorenza, forgive me. If you had had the courage to keep silent I could still have remained beside you, helping and sustaining you, as I have done until to-day. I might still have remained for a time Your sister returns to-morrow; you know she has refused to leave this place. Besides, it would be monstrous selfishness to take you away."

"It does not matter, it does not matter," murmured Lorenza, with trembling lips.

"Oh, gentle and deceived one, I can never forgive myself!"

"Take me away, take me away, I cannot live without you!" implored the poor creature.

"It is not possible."

"And why? Why?"

"What would your conscience say if you were in my place? Would not the memory of the dead assail you?"

The blow was well directed; Lorenza shivered. But the words of the deepest perfidy were still to come:

"Nor can I expect you to embrace my theories all at once; that which to me is natural and moral repels you. I should always respect you, I should adore you for the sacrifice you had made, but the world would call you . . . .

"Enough, Gustavo, enough!" she entreated, hoping to be spared the word.

But he pronounced it.

"The world would call you my mistress."

"Oh, Holy Virgin, help me!" cried Lorenza, in desperation, bursting at last into sobs.

"Farewell, then."

"You are going, you are going?"

"I must go."

"I will not let you go!"

Gustavo paused to look at her in astonishment; where had she found that unfamiliar voice, that imperious tone? Did she, by chance, possess another and a stronger soul, hitherto unknown? Had her silence and her gentleness been one long piece of acting? Ah, she was already losing her courage; not for her was proud revolt, not for her imperious command; she was born for passive obedience and for resignation.

There was nothing new to discover, it was all

over, he could go. He smiled sadly as he gazed at her. She retained that smile in her soul.

The last hours of that terrible day were passed by Lorenza in a condition of complete mental and moral exhaustion, but in the evening, when she went across the fields to meet Luisa, and when she saw that other unhappy figure waiting for her, Lorenza burst into passionate sobs, and threw herself into the arms of her eldest sister.

"What is the matter, Renza? What has happened?" asked Luisa in consternation, trying to look into the face of her she still considered a child, but she could hardly see her by the faint light of the stars. Those sobs breaking the silence of the night, those tears like an innocent child's, which Lorenza shed without ceasing, so that they streamed over her hands and bathed the face of her sister, against whom she leaned, and to whom she drew still closer and closer, her manifest despair and speechless anguish, filled Luisa with indescribable grief.

"Oh, Renza, Renza, dear child, what is it? Are you unhappy? Ought we not all to be happy? Caterina is coming home to-morrow."

"It is not that, no, it is not that," said Lorenza, in a broken whisper.

"Have you not seen Gustavo to-day?" asked Luisa, with the gentle and melancholy indulgence of those who have known passion.

At the name of the beloved a great trembling seized Lorenza; the sister started, she understood.

"Tell me all," she said in a tone of command.

Lorenza, thus ordered, replied :

" He will not have me, he will not have me now."

" Not have you now ? And why ? Tell me all, I want to know everything. How was it ? What did he say to you ? Don't cry any more. I won't have it, you should not weep for a man. Speak ! "

She was no longer the Luisa that life has chastised and broken ; she became once more, for a moment, the indomitable, passionate woman who with such energy had scorned and wounded many hearts for the sake of the happiness of one adored soul. At the sight of Lorenza's anguish she felt a bitterness greater than all other bitterness, never had her heart been so wrung, not even by her own sufferings, not even when Caterina abused herself to commit a crime. Even the pure life of the sweetest, the most innocent of creatures must be overwhelmed by the sins of others.

" Speak ! "

And Lorenza, subjugated as though by fascination, related the scene that had taken place that morning, tasting once again its humiliations, its surprises, and its grief. She described it faithfully, truthfully, and her sister, with the experience of one who has proved the depths of human selfishness, quickly interpreted the meaning of her tale.

" You were not, then, bound by a secret promise ? " asked Luisa when Lorenza had finished her sad story.

" No, no ! I deceived myself, I was hasty and imprudent."

"I do not wish you to accuse yourself!"

"But . . . ."

"No, Renza, hush! And it was to you that he dared to speak of free love? To a saint like you?"

"Luisa! He . . . ."

"When we all looked upon you as betrothed to that coward, who compromised you by his attentions! Not you alone have been deceived, child, Mariani has deceived us all. The truth is, he grew tired, like all the others, more than all the others, do you understand? Because the others were brutal, but he was acting a sentimental comedy."

"Oh no! No, Luisa! It was because of Caterina . . . ."

"Child, child that you are! You can believe that! And why did he not mention me too? Why did he not think of giving my fault also as a reason? The severe moralist no doubt forgot that, the great apostle of new and generous ideas overlooked an important argument . . . ."

"Do not speak like that, do not speak in that way of him!" entreated Lorenza.

"Neither would I listen to my mother!" murmured Luisa, falling back into the melancholy calm that had grown habitual to her with time.

The two sisters moved on, walking for a while through the dark fields. There seemed vibrations all around them; was it the leaves on the trees shaken by the breeze? Was it the tall grass upraising itself after bending under their steps as though complaining of being trodden under foot?

It was a poem of death. Suddenly, by a common impulse, the two women halted. Luisa drew Lorenza gently towards herself and began to talk to her tenderly, in the silent darkness, stroking her hair and putting her lips close to her ear, while Lorenza listened in deepest discouragement.

"It may be so, Caterina and I may in truth have been the cause of your misfortune; it may be so. I, as the eldest, ask your forgiveness humbly, I ask forgiveness for her and for myself. I ought not to have been so violent, I know—I know it all. When those we love are blamed, those whom, by a decree of fate, we love despite all others, it is as though others made the faults of those dear ones our own. Forgive me, I was violent, for I love you so much, so much, do you know?"

"Oh, Luisa, Luisa," and again the tears began to flow over Lorenza's cheeks.

"But what will you do now? You will be strong, will you not? You will pray?"

"I will pray."

"Perhaps you may forget, who knows!"

"I can never forget, Luisa."

"God might have spared you!"

"Hush, Luisa, hush!"

"And what will Caterina say to-morrow? Shall you tell her everything, as you have told me?"

"If she asks I shall tell her everything, as I have told you."

"Oh, Lorenza, tell me that you will take comfort, tell me that!"

"I hope to feel resigned, later on, after a long time perhaps, who knows!"

The weary voice betrayed that the words were not true, that there was no hope, that resignation would never come.

"Listen, Renza; now, when Caterina has returned, we shall not be able to see each other so often, I shall lose a great comfort, my Renza!"

"Never mind, Luisa, I will come secretly every night, just the same; these meetings do me so much good, also!"

"Blessings on you, my poor, dear child!"

That evening Luisa accompanied Lorenza as far as the half-opened gate of Casa Soave. Then, while the poor child with difficulty pushed open the heavy house-door, as the hinges groaned dismally, and the bell gave a cracked tinkle, Donna Luisa was assailed by bitter memories, by the vision of an evening now long gone by, an agonising memory, an insupportable vision, which arrested every word of comfort upon her lips.

"Good-bye," she said in a choking voice, as she turned away and walked rapidly along the road she had come. To Lorenza, who had turned to answer her parting salute, it seemed as though the darkness had engulfed her despairing shadow.

Lorenza crossed the courtyard, passed through the portico, pushed open the glass-door and found herself in the hall. Without calling a servant she lighted the great hanging lamp; a dim light fell on her and showed her pale face, which still bore the traces of tears.

"Are you crying, auntie?" asked Rinaldo's voice, "do you not know that mamma is coming home to-morrow?"

Lorenza looked up startled, and her eyes fell on the pretty little figure of her nephew.

"Oh, darling, were you here alone in the dark?"

"Giuditta is busy, and mademoiselle is playing the piano; mademoiselle is very happy. Are you not happy, too, auntie?"

"Yes, I am very happy too."

"Mademoiselle plays well, does she not? Is she very clever, mademoiselle?"

"Very clever, darling, very."

For the first time now she noticed the sounds of music which came from the next room. It was many years since Casa Soave had awakened to harmonious echoes, and these sounds seemed so strange now, amidst the deep silence. She listened for a moment and then explained:

"Beethoven."

After a little while, kissing the child's curls, she said, "Ask mademoiselle to put you to bed."

The boy, who was accustomed to strict obedience, threw his arms around her neck.

"Good night, auntie."

"Good night, little angel."

Hardly had Rinaldo gone to or three steps when he returned and said gently:

"Be good, auntie, and play something whilst I am saying my prayers. I like it so much! I shall hear you, one can hear up there in the nursery."

"Yes, dear, go now, go and sleep."

"But listen, play me that long, long melancholy thing."

"Yes, my treasure, yes," consented Lorenza, smiling sadly, without guessing what the "long, long melancholy thing," might be.

When, after a few minutes, she sat down to the piano, it seemed as if sad music flowed spontaneously from her transparent fingers; it was an improvisation, an unconscious creation of a mystic character, mingled with snatches of profane harmony, sudden snatches instantly drowned by the ascetic wave, sobs of passion which broke through here and there, and high aspirations, and the thought of God. Lorenza was an artist, but she was, above all, a woman who loved and suffered. Music was not for her the delicious vortex which might have absorbed and saved the soul of a man, it was but an attempt to obtain tranquillity, and scarcely had the echo of the last note passed away than Lorenza, moved by an irresistible impulse of human love, began to weep once more. Who knows! Perhaps no woman will ever be a perfect artist, because she will never be enough of an egotist.

It is better so.

Another passage from Gustavo's diary:

"I did not believe that the *angelic butterfly* could talk and rave like *the others*. She spoke first;

the golden threads of the mystic spell are broken for ever."

Caterina, dressed all in black and very calm, had resumed her habit of walking about the house, giving the most exact orders, doubtless carrying out a plan she had long had in her mind.

Giuditta obeyed silently; Andrea obeyed with evident satisfaction, assisted by some young men from the village who cast timid glances at Caterina. Lorenza remained for a while watching the work, then took refuge in the library with Rinaldo and mademoiselle. But a painful confusion reigned in the heart of the mystic, —to her surprise she found herself *thinking;* she was no longer sunk in contemplation, she reasoned, she questioned. Caterina was not changed in the least; what was it that upheld her pride? It was not prayer, it was not the clear consciousness of having nothing wherewith to reproach herself. Nor did she really cherish in her soul a monstrous pleasure at having performed a repulsive duty. How could such a strong, resisting pride exist now? Poor Lorenza! Never would she be able to comprehend; not for her the problems of dark minds. There was in her spirit such depths of humility that she even felt impelled to accuse herself of sins that were not her own. She would never have found happiness in self-exaltation, but rather in forgetfulness of herself and of her own aspirations. Ah,

if only Gustavo had wished it! Still, in spite of everything, the thought of Gustavo had the splendour of the sun. It seemed to her that by some strange mystery the *darkness had come from the sun*. This, in truth, was Lorenza's thought put into words.

Caterina, inflexible and firm, was always present as the great changes went on; that is to say, the house, by her orders, re-assumed its aspect of many years before—the drawing-rooms were cleared, the carpets were taken up, the pictures and curtains taken down, the statues, nicknacks and modern furniture removed.

Every now and then Caterina would say:

"Take all that to the top-story." Or with a scornful air: "Put those ridiculous things in the garret."

Giuditta trembled at these orders; the good but superstitious old soul feared the vengeance of the murdered man. Andrea, who remembered the house as it had been in the days of Anna and Don Carlo Soave, without waiting for orders substituted the old furniture for the new, and gave back to everything the aspect of the good old times. Caterina smiled silently at the servant who remembered.

She had killed the man; she now destroyed all traces of his sojourn there.

Thus she found herself, at last, before the door of the room that had been Lodovico Rosalba's. Giuditta, who held the bunch of keys, stopped, hesitating and frightened.

Caterina turned resolutely to Andrea.

"Open the door," she commanded. She herself remained on the threshold, waiting until the shutters should be unbarred and the windows thrown open. Then she looked all round attentively, without a tremor, but she did not go in.

"No one has been in here?" she asked, turning suddenly.

"No one," replied Giuditta in a low voice.

"That is well; take everything away and leave the room empty."

She remained on the threshold until all was finished, moving aside whenever it was needful to leave the passage free to those who were carrying out the things. When the last piece of furniture had disappeared, she herself, with her small strong hand, closed the door and locked it.

"Bring me the account-books," she said to Andrea.

Seeing her so calm, the old servant trembled as he obeyed her.

Donna Caterina examined the books attentively, made some corrections here and there, asked for explanations, and from time to time lifted her clear scrutinising eyes, fixing them with habitual coldness on Andrea's face.

At last the lady said: "I am content with you; you may go."

Giuditta and Andrea, quite dazed, left her as she desired. And when she was alone, Donna

Caterina, slowly, slowly, made the circuit of the whole house, taking possession of it once more.

"What did she say to Rinaldo?" was poor Luisa's first question that evening.

Lorenza sighed.

"How she must have kissed and embraced him, poor baby!" continued Luisa, who had strong maternal instincts. "I had not a moment's peace to-day for thinking of you all! Will you not tell me anything, dear? Has Gustavo come back? Has Caterina asked for him? Won't you speak, Renza?"

"I cannot speak—not yet," sorrowfully murmured the sweet mouth, and strove vainly to restrain its sobs.

Luisa asked no more questions. The evening was bright with moonlight and as fair as the previous evening had been dark. The usual walk was prolonged some hours; the two sisters went slowly along the country roads, protected by the calm smile of the moon. There was no movement, no sound near them, the striking of the hours alone broke the silence.

They sat down for a few minutes on the trunk of a fallen tree.

Then Lorenza explained:

"She kissed the boy and me, hurriedly, rearranged the house, examined the accounts . . . ."

"What?"

"Then she walked all over the house again, and at table she asked me, ironically, how it stood with Gustavo's love."

"Ah! Well? And you?"

"I told her all; she laughed, and sneered both at him and at me."

"She did not comfort you?"

"She derided me, that was all."

"She said nothing, not one word?"

"Yes; she said, 'it would be vile and odious to go on loving him,' I felt as if I should die. Perhaps it may be vile and odious, but most certainly I love him still, and shall love him for ever."

"My poor Renza!"

"And tell me, Luisa, you who have loved . . . ." Luisa felt her heart melting with tenderness, "even if Gustavo had lied, if his renunciation had been a proof of scant affection, or even of the entire absence of love, if . . . . in short, would that be a sufficient reason for loving him no longer? Does the inconstancy of others justify our own?"

Luisa was struck with admiration and pity.

"You alone, of the Soaves, have understood the meaning of love," she said gravely. "This is true love; you love and ask nothing. I tremble to think of what you will suffer in the future."

"I am not afraid; if I had been the traitor, I should have been afraid," answered Lorenza, who had the pride of humility. And she rose to go.

"Good-bye till to morrow evening," said Luisa.

"Farewell," murmured the other.

"Answer me," entreated Luisa, also rising, and with a sudden tremor in her voice, "will you come to-morrow evening?"

Lorenza, surprised, assented with eyes and speech: "Certainly I will come."

And as if she were talking to herself, she added, "I don't know why Caterina avoids looking at the child."

"Ah!" was all Luisa said.

And they parted.

When Lorenza reached the end of the meadows, and was about to push open the great iron gate, she heard her name called in a low voice. But however low the voice, she recognised it, and stopped instantly, saying in gentle tones:

"Is that you, Gustavo? God protect you!"

"God guard you, dear one! Are you surprised to see me again?"

"No, Gustavo, I was sure you would come back."

"There is no hope, Lorenza."

"I have not hope, but I was certain you would return."

"Then you do not blame me? You believe me, you understand me?"

"Yes, Gustavo, yes."

A momentary wave of feeling passed over the spirit of the actor, ready for the last scene.

"I was not strong enough, dear dream of my youth. I longed to see you once again."

Lorenza opened her arms, and then folded them on her breast, as though in prayer.

"Are you going, Gustavo?"

"I am going."

"For ever?"

"I am going to Germany; I can make a position for myself there. Wilfred Heyse is expecting me."

"When you come back . . . ."

"I shall not come back, dear—never, never."

"God help us!"

"Lorenza, dear saint, I have a favour to ask of you."

"Ask it, Gustavo."

"I want a remembrance of the dead, something that was Lodovico's to take away with me."

"Not now, it is too late. If you would return to-morrow evening, secretly . . . ."

"If I would return . . . . ?"

"You could choose for yourself; I will take you upstairs where all the things that belonged to him have been placed."

"I will come at eight o'clock," he said, turning to go.

"Good-bye till to-morrow," whispered Lorenza, trembling with hope.

"Farewell," said Gustavo.

Donna Caterina had been awaiting her sister for a long time.

"You have adopted the poetic habit of taking lonely walks at night, have you?" said the proud and haughty woman.

Lorenza grew red.

"I beg your pardon, I did not suppose you would be waiting for me."

"Is it true that every evening you see the person whom our father cursed?"

"Caterina!"

"Answer me, is it true?"

"Who told you this, Caterina?"

"I wish to know if it is true; you know that I will not allow anything that is beneath our dignity."

"You will never forgive, then?"

"Never."

"Mother . . . ."

"Would never have disobeyed our father."

"Caterina, be merciful, we all have need of pardon and pity."

"Enough. I will allow no treason, remember. Not even your treason to the holy and venerated memory of my father."

"What profanation!" exclaimed Gustavo Mariani, as he and Lorenza entered the glass gallery on the top floor of the house.

They had left the faithful Giuditta at the foot of the winding staircase that led up to it. Lorenza placed the lamp on a Japanese lacquered table and seated herself in a high-backed armchair.

"What profanation!" repeated Gustavo, as he looked around him.

They had thrown everything down there in a heap, carpets, furniture, works of art, and the result was a strange confusion, something between Vandalism and a *bric-à-brac* shop. Through the long glass gallery the moon shed her cold, silvery light everywhere and over everything; Gustavo, obeying an artistic impulse, extinguished the lamp,

which threw a discordant note of colour into that soft silver light—Lorenza started, and then sat there motionless. With her white dress and pale gold hair, she looked like Ophelia, and her faithful eyes followed Gustavo unweariedly. He appeared to be setting a scene; seized with infinite pity for all these things thrown there and deserted, spreading out a piece of carpet, arranging the Turkish cushions, setting up the chairs, lifting the ornaments from the ground and placing them on the Japanese table, propping up pictures against the backs of chairs, until he had improvised a room. Then he decided to choose something from amongst the arms and statuettes.

"Take them all, take them all," said Lorenza in a low voice.

"No, no, I only want one thing of his, something that was very dear to him."

He did not hurry himself. This tenderness for the dead man, a tenderness which made his voice tremble, wrung the girl's heart.

"Take a picture, then; he was very fond of pictures—choose one and I will send it you to-morrow."

Mariani finally decided on a landscape of the Dutch school, but still he did not seem in any haste to go. Lorenza felt as if she must count her moments of happiness, few enough, certainly.

The scene pleased him; it was wrapped in a soft mist like a vision, there was a dreamy light, and all outlines were confused and faint; he went

to one of the windows and opened it, as though to allow the moon to enter and reign supreme. He looked down into the wild garden, bright with the silver light; then he turned and leaned against the window with the seductive moonlight falling upon his head and shoulders.

"How can Caterina remain here? How can she stay quietly in this house?" said Gustavo suddenly with a genuine shudder.

"If she knew . . . ." sighed Lorenza.

"Do you acknowledge her right to judge you?" he asked indignantly.

"I have no one but her," said the girl humbly.

"You have your soul, you have the rectitude of your own judgment."

"It is not enough."

"The judgment of a woman who has committed murder is worthless, the sentiment of obedience should not be strained too far. I hate Caterina."

"Have pity, Gustavo, have pity."

"I have no pity, save for you."

"And no love?"

"I must not."

"Then it is settled, you are really going?"

"Yes, Lorenza."

"I want to tell you something serious, Gustavo."

"Speak."

"Something very serious."

"Tell me."

She rose and went close to him.

"I have decided to leave home."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gustavo, alarmed by the idea that Lorenza intended to follow him.

"I wish to become a nun," she said slowly and recklessly.

"Ah!" said Gustavo again, surprised and interested.

He gazed at her for a moment—a slender, ascetic figure dressed in white—it was a *type*, and it pleased him.

"Do you approve of it?" asked Lorenza, trembling.

"Oh yes."

"You approve of it!" she cried with a burst of grief.

"You were born for this, you sweet martyr, to love God, to forget yourself in prayer. You have a mystic soul, you were not made for earthly affections, for human passions, you are not for love, but for adoration."

"I adore you," said Lorenza, drawing closer to him who refused her love. Gustavo thought some passionate, unknown voice was speaking.

"You believe so now, but when you have followed your true vocation you will think of me no longer, or will look upon me as a dream."

"I adore you!" repeated the girl, growing excited.

"It is not true, it is not true!"

"Gustavo!"

"It is not true, I don't believe it," denied the young man, striving to keep her at a distance.

But she would not let him, she drew close

enough to him to place her face against his, putting her little hands on his shoulders and looking into his eyes, which grew troubled and would not endure her scrutiny.

"Gustavo, look at me."

"No, no, I will not."

"Look at me—do not go away—I want you to tell me again, do you really believe I do not love you?"

"No, you do not love me—let me go! I don't believe you, I don't believe you," answered Gustavo, rendered brutal by impatience, beginning to feel an instinctive terror, and wishing at all hazards to repulse Lorenza.

To be misunderstood by those we love is truly the deepest wound, the heaviest cross of life, the cup of supreme bitterness, and the most cruel trial reserved for those who give themselves entirely. The Christian soul of Lorenza, even though tempered by grief, could not bear it. And while her spirit lost itself in a fatal path of error wherein it could not arrest itself, the feeble body acquired a violent nervous force and clung obstinately to Gustavo, who was stunned and exasperated by what had happened.

Delirious, beside herself, the girl now covered his face with kisses, murmuring fond and tender words, telling him in soft and rambling tones the sweet folly of her love, telling it with ardent kisses that she rained unceasingly upon him, kisses which communicated her growing distraction to him, kindling his blood and inspiring him with infinite dread.

"No, Lorenza, no; this is delirium. It will pass; you will be persuaded. If you loved me now, if you had loved me ever, you would not have acted as you did; you would have given yourself to me of your own free will, forgetful of all human prejudice and law!"

Ah! then it was that he understood, with a last gleam of reason, that these words had ruined Lorenza, that she actually offered herself, gave herself in wild desperation. Clinging to him, pressing to his her mouth, suddenly grown keen and insatiable of kisses, she drew, she lured him into an abyss of passion, telling him that nothing mattered now, the world was of no account, and she would give him the proof of her absorbing love. She became the seducer now; she it was who seduced him who once had devised to seduce her and had now grown weary of the pursuit. Seduction was in the air, it penetrated his marrow, it intoxicated his brain, destiny willed it, and the silence, the soft faint light, the strange luxury of his surroundings, conspired together against him. This palpitating body which abandoned itself to him, no longer inspired him with repulsion, but with burning desire, mingled with curiosity and rage. This was another woman, a woman whose face was transfigured by tears and love, a woman with blazing eyes and scorching lips.

He fiercely seized her, then, this other woman, who revealed herself to him and desired to be his. He encircled her with vigorous arms, lifted her, and bore her to where the carpet was spread, to

where, by a strange disposition of fate, he had prepared everything; and a wild burst of emotion and irony seized him. He could have wept aloud. Gently on the soft cushions he laid the frail body, so torn by delirium and passion, and gazed at her an instant. She was white, all white—white dress and white face. Then he took for his own that *other woman* who had surprised and led him on.

And never once were her arms unlaced from round his neck.

One last passage from Gustavo Mariani's diary, written that same night:

"I am certainly asleep still. Sad sleep and bad dreams. I shall leave at once. I do not wish to wake up here."

Giuditta awoke and started. How was it she found herself still there, at the foot of the little staircase? Had Donna Lorenza not come down? Of course she had, at that hour! It was dawn. But how had she passed her without awakening her? The old woman trembled and shivered; how many hours had she been there, sitting on the lowest step?

And supposing Donna Lorenza were still up there? What if she had been suddenly taken ill, and had called to her in vain? And what had become of Signor Gustavo?

"I am a useless old woman!" said Giuditta to herself, as she began to ascend the steep and tortuous stair. "I cannot keep awake, but I hope

Donna Lorenza has been in her little bed a long time." And she smiled, as though she thought of the slumber of a child.

But Donna Lorenza was still up there. She was standing immovable in the centre of the gallery, with her white dress re-arranged about her, so pale, so desperate, with a thousand terrors mirrored in her wide-open eyes, that Giuditta thought she beheld a spectre. In the opaline light of the dawn the old servant saw the rumpled carpet, the disordered cushions. Lorenza must have fallen there.

"Oh, forgive me, signora, forgive me! I fell asleep, and you have certainly been very ill."

"Silence!" was the scarcely audible reply.

Giuditta gazed at her in amazement, as she approached with the step and motion of an automaton, with rigid face and staring eyes.

"Swear to me that you will say nothing about this night, Giuditta. Swear it."

"I swear it, Donna Lorenza," said the old woman, trembling with the fear that she had understood what had occurred.

"You know me, Giuditta; you know . . . ."

"I know that you are good, that I care for you, and that you let me love you as if you were my own daughter. Did I not carry you in my arms when you were a little child?"

The remembrance of the innocent days of the past, awakened by Giuditta's simple words, pierced Lorenza's heart, but brought her the relief of tears.

Giuditta was glad; she preferred this long fit of weeping to the dreadful calmness, the rigidity of heretofore.

"Donna Lorenza, speak to me. I will say nothing; I will tell nobody. I am faithful to you, and you know it; but relieve my heart. Something has happened here."

"God has forsaken me!" cried the weeping girl at last, and she could say nothing more, not even when, later on, Giuditta took her to her cell-like little room and laid her in her white bed, comforting her with motherly words.

"God has forsaken me! God has forsaken me!"

Nothing more, nothing but this; and the cry became a prayer, a lament, a whisper, until the sun penetrated through the closed blinds, and she mercifully fell asleep, like a child, her face wet with tears, and her thin fair hair spread over the pillow, the humble halo of a saint—a saint still and for ever.

The awakening was cruel. The woman reviewed with pitiless severity the error committed by the girl; the religious question was silenced now, almost effaced by the disastrous defeat of human pride. She saw the whole abyss into which she had fallen, and measured the depth of it; she had ruined herself in the miserable desire to prove her love to a man who did not want her; he had not taken her voluntarily, but only *accepted* her in a feverish tumult of the senses. It seemed to her, therefore, as if she had deserved it all deepest

scorn and complete desertion. She did not assure him, but shivered with horror at herself. Nevertheless, she expected him for two days; it was like a prolongation of her sin, but it did not last long. She had come to a decision; she could no longer remain there, offending the unsullied memories of the house. She profaned Caterina, the only one of the sisters who had not yielded to the weakness of the flesh; she profaned mademoiselle, a young girl who was most scrupulous in the discharge of her duties; she profaned the child. She offended by her presence the servants who thought her innocent; she even felt as if she insulted the senseless objects around her. Everything awakened her remorse, even things that could know nothing about her.

Luisa, seeing her no more, was consumed with fear.

On the morning of the third day Lorenza could bear it no longer; she felt as if she were suffocating, dying; it was too much. She went in search of Caterina, and, throwing herself at her feet, confessed everything.

"You gave yourself to that scoundrel!" shrieked Caterina, starting back in horror. She closed the door and windows; this great, this immense, unexpected disgrace must go no further, it must be buried there. Then the austere woman turned towards her penitent sister, who was prostrate with desperation, and said brutally:

"Finish!"

But few words remained to be said. She was

silent, her strength abandoned her, and she sank upon the floor.

Caterina looked down with disgust on the miserable body stretched there ; she felt not the slightest pity. She asked :

" Have you told all ? "

"I have told all."

Inflexible in the icy calm of her contempt, Caterina questioned her further :

" Have you come to any resolution ? "

Lorenza rose, utterly, hopelessly crushed, morally dead.

" The missionary men, who are now lodging at the convent of the Benedictines, leave to-morrow. I shall go with them."

Caterina breathed freely. She had nothing to say to the sister who was departing for ever.

" Will you forgive me, Caterina ? "

There was a moment's pause. Lorenza waited supplicatingly.

"Yes," replied the woman who did not understand the sin.

" Will you kiss me for the last time ? "

" No," was the immediate answer of the woman who hated sin and punished it.

" Oh, Caterina . . . . "

" Hush ! go, go."

It was an order born of repulsion. Lorenza shivered from head to foot as she heard it. With outstretched, imploring arms she moved backwards towards the door and vanished.

Shortly afterwards, mademoiselle opened the door

suddenly, and just showed her face inside, pale with fear, saying:

"Donna Lorenza is very ill."

Caterina did not move.

Later on little Rinaldo came in. He went up to his mother, and said:

"The doctor is with auntie. They have all left me alone, let me stay with you, mamma."

And he climbed into her lap, stroking her face with his little hands, with lingering, soft caresses. Suddenly Donna Caterina rose, and put the child down, crying:

"Don't look at me! Don't look at me!"

Then, for the first time, she burst into wild, delirious sobs. It was a violent manifestation of grief.

In the afternoon Giuditta went secretly to tell Luisa. There was no time to be lost; the departure of the future missionary was fixed for the next day at an early hour.

Luisa seemed thunderstruck; she grew almost crazy as she listened to Giuditta's story, but, more than by Gustavo's cowardly desertion, more than by the revelation of what had taken place on that fatal evening, she was horrified by the thought that Lorenza, wearied and defeated, was going away for ever. The departure must be prevented at all hazards; the poor, sick girl must not be allowed to sacrifice and condemn herself, the poor creature who of a surety had ruined herself, and been lost in a moment of unconsciousness. Luisa was sure of this;

the miserable, guilty child must not be punished, and if she were sent away it would be her death.

And was God just? Was He just?

Was it humane to allow the sacrifice to be completed in solitude, far away, in deepest penitence? Could two women like Caterina and Luisa allow Lorenza to punish herself with such inexorable blindness?

Ah! these two they had drawn more than one heart into the orbit of the blindest, the most egotistical pride, but the poor flower who had faded during the most spotless waiting, had done no one any harm; she had been a lily in the desert, the sole poetry of the house, a poem of the sweetest resignation, a star in the darkest night. And ought they to forget that Lorenza had been sublime with regard to the faults of others, greater, even, than in the generosity of pardon, for she had always kept silence and forgotten? Luisa was seized with fear; an intense maternal yearning took possession of her. In her mind's eye she saw Lorenza in the monastic dress, her pallid, bloodless face whiter and colder than the white nun's hood that she wore, her weak shoulders weighed down by the rough, heavy tunic, her frail body encircled by the knotted girdle of the order; she saw her face, the compassionate face of Lorenza, with those lips, that had always been pale, half-opened, arched in slow agony, two delicate bows of faintest rose-colour. And thus she would die.

"We will prevent it, will we not, Giuditta? We are indulgent, we have loved."

And the old servant assented, nodding her head, her sunken lips trembling convulsively with suppressed sobs; the old servant who had loved them all three, and had wept equally for Caterina, who knew not how to love, for Luisa, who had loved too well, and for Lorenza, who had confused the Divine with the human love.

"We will prevent it."

But she knew not how, and, in a desperate tension of mind, she sought the means, standing in the narrow deserted lane, before the door of the peasant dwelling which had been hers for so many years. She stood there, gazing with the look of a dying eagle at the sun, which was sinking slowly behind the hedges in the distance. Then something, an idea, came into the black eyes, which brightened and flashed with new recklessness. She had decided, and, bending towards Giuditta, she said:

"Now go. I thank you for coming here."

"Well, then . . . ."

"You will see me later at the castle," she explained, hurriedly.

And as the old woman appeared to be struck motionless by astonishment, Luisa, not wishing to betray her feelings in her face, turned and went into the house.

She began to dress in the vast room that had been her nuptial chamber, and as she put on the black-silk gown that she had not worn for such a long, long time, she was struck by the vulgarity of her surroundings. What a miserable place! The huge, high bed with its coverlet of raw silk, the

common chest of drawers, the massive wardrobe, the walnut press, and, at the head of the bed, the little vessel of holy water and the branch of olive. On the bed lay the dress she had just taken off, looking like a person who had flung herself down in despair and with outstretched arms. From the kitchen-garden beneath the open window came a scent of herbs, a confused humming, and a wave of hot air.

The house, deserted at that hour, was quiet. Some one would return before long; she must make haste.

Shame and fear seized her, and she sat down for a moment on the chest, faint and giddy. Without thinking of what she was doing she had put on the gold ornaments of the Casa Valenti,* but the instant she noticed them she took them off—the earrings, the brooch, the massive chain—and in her hurry to get away she laid them down on the chest, as being the nearest place. Instinctively she had taken off her wedding-ring also.

She went down the wooden stairs, and as she passed the kitchen she saw her daughter Lucia moving to and fro, putting things in order. The girl's eyes, which were black and brilliant, rested for a moment on her mother. Those eyes made Luisa shiver.

"When did you come back, Lucia?"

"A moment ago."

* Every well-to-do peasant family possesses a set of gold ornaments, which descends to the eldest son's wife.

The young voice, which had not a tone of sweetness in it, made Luisa shiver again.

"I must go out on important business; take care of the house."

The girl did not answer.

As Luisa went across the fields a man's voice from behind the hedge made her start violently: "Oh mother, where are you going in all that splendour? To find me a wife, perhaps?"

Luisa stopped and smiled; it was her son Peppino, the eldest, a handsome and vigorous youth. He wore a grey felt hat, a maroon-velvet shooting jacket, and carried a gun slung across his shoulders. He had his mother's dark eyes, a bronzed countenance, and a big, healthy, sensual mouth, which smiled readily and disclosed small, white, cruel-looking teeth.

"I am going to Roccalta on business," said Luisa, looking at her son with pride.

"May I come with you, mother?"

"No."

"Mysteries," exclaimed Peppino, laughing.

"Mysteries," repeated Luisa, walking on.

Peppino stood still for an instant to look at her as she walked, and then it was the son who smiled with pride as he admired his mother's tall figure.

All the humility which Luisa had felt on the way vanished as the decisive moment approached. As she neared the castle she seemed to regain her wild and defiant youth, which would certainly have ruined the cause she came to defend. What was the cause of this change, so contrary to the

desire she earnestly felt to pray and implore? Was the humility which moves and conquers never to be possible with her?"

As she crossed the courtyard of the Casa Soave, Donna Luisa saw Andrea bending over the edge of the well and drawing up a heavy bucket of water. The servant gave a cry of surprise when he saw her, but she had already passed through the portico and was crossing the hall with long, firm steps, calmly and proudly.

In the drawing-room, Giuditta was laying the table under mademoiselle's composed superintendence.

"Mais . . . ." said the young French lady, stopping short at the sight of Luisa.

"Let her pass, Donna Caterina is expecting her," said Giuditta, exchanging a glance of intelligence with Luisa as she told the falsehood.

"Je ne savais pas, et je vous demande mille fois pardon. Madame Catherine est dans sa chambre," added mademoiselle courteously.

"C'est bien, je vous remercie," answered the proud Luisa as she was about to ascend the stairs.

"Elle est vraiment royale!" thought the French girl, quite captivated, "presque une czarine."

"Come in," said Caterina, when she heard a knock at the door.

And the surprise was too great, even for her. Rinaldo was with her, sitting in a little chair; his mother took him by the hand and led him to the landing, saying:

"Go downstairs, Nino, I am coming down, too, very soon."

Luisa followed the child with kindly looks, and her eyes dwelt on the little figure that reminded her of another loved and slender one, that of Vincenzo, who was a student at the seminary in the nearest town.

This remembrance filled her heart with passionate tenderness, and yet at the same time it ached, as with remorse. Why?

"Let me hear what you have to say," said Caterina, as she returned and remained standing in the middle of the room.

Luisa drew herself up proudly to her full height, then, remembering instantly, she conquered her pride and said in a low and gentle voice:

"I pray you to listen to me patiently, Caterina, for I have come to speak about Lorenza, our youngest sister, with whom we ought to be gentle and to whom we owe indulgence."

A shade of annoyance came into Caterina's eyes and a look of disgust passed over her tragic and regular face. But she said nothing, only waited.

"I know Lorenza looks upon you as the real mistress of the house, I know that it is you only whom she obeys. It is right that it should be so, and it is to you, therefore, that I appeal to prevent her going away to-morrow."

"You came here to tell me this—you?

"For this. I have come for the first time, for the last time, after so many years, to entreat

you to do this, Caterina; you alone can prevent this departure, and you *ought* to, Caterina."

"I have a very clear idea of duty, and you know it. I see no duty here. I refuse."

"You refuse? Oh, think what you are doing, Caterina! Remember that she is ill and in despair."

"She has sinned, and must atone for her sin."

"But ever since she has been in this world she has atoned for the sins of others, the sins of severity, the sins of desertion, but you and I have punished her quite enough; . . . . think of it!"

"It is possible that the example before her has been fatal; but whose example, yours or mine?"

The cruelty was too great, there was too much scorn written on Caterina's face, a calm, impassible face on which the morning's tears had left no traces. Luisa understood; this woman, madly tenacious of foolish, legendary, traditional ideas of duty, had not been softened by her crime; on the contrary, the weaknesses of others were no excuse for indulgence, but only served to destroy all the terrors that surrounded her own past. To this had Caterina come—she glorified assassination.

"Oh, my sister, my sister, forget! Be good and forget! Let us spare Lorenza; use your authority over her, by the memory of our father and mother I implore you."

"It is late for you to remember them Luisa."

"Does the sweetness of pardon not exist for you, then? Shall you always be inexorable?"

"I hate what is useless, and forgiveness is useless; forgiveness is weakness, forgiveness does not destroy the past."

"But it softens the present."

"Memory is stronger than the passing moment."

"Do not entrench yourself behind a barrier of empty sentences, Caterina, whilst a creature who loves us is preparing to die."

"To expiate is not to die."

"Do not argue. Did we argue? Did Lorenza and I argue when we went to defend you without belief in what we said?"

"Without belief? There, you see, you are two weak natures born for falsehood. I did not ask to be defended and you know it. We have talked enough, I think; I have said I will not prevent Lorenza taking the right course. That is sufficient."

"Then you refuse altogether?"

"Altogether and for ever."

"Oh, how I hate you!" cried Luisa in exasperation, and recovering the impetuous energy she had lost. And the other fixed her dark, flashing eyes upon her, satisfied and indomitable.

"I knew it," she said, "I prefer you like that, for now you are the real Luisa."

The last moment of this sisters' struggle, a terrible, mediæval, atavistic thing, was approaching; they both felt it, equally and intuitively.

Luisa advanced a few steps.

"You are going to let an innocent child depart?" she asked.

The menacing voice did not alarm Caterina; without moving, with the instinctive, infallible perverseness inborn in certain feminine natures, she found the answer:

"Lorenza is not a child, she is nearly thirty years old and she is not innocent. Your son Vincenzo is truly an innocent child, yet you have already condemned him, and you are going to make a priest of him."

Luisa seemed dumbfounded, attacked thus at the most painful and tragical point of her strong maternal feelings.

"But what do you know?" she asked breathlessly, her heart beating with unconquerable terror.

"Ah, you see!" exclaimed Caterina in hateful triumph. Then she said quietly:

"I know nothing. *I guess.*"

The sister fled, vanquished.

She began to run; she lost herself in the wide country which lay gorgeous and grand beneath the sunset, all red as though it were on fire.

PART III

THE DEATH OF A SOUL

Rich in Love? Blessed by Love?

PART III

THE DEATH OF A SOUL

"You are beautiful!"

These were the words of Luisa's love for Antonio, and in this, probably, lay the strength of that passion, powerful and concentrated admiration for his physical beauty. She had always looked at him rather than listened to him; she had not sought to reach his soul, she had admired him as a living statue. It had been like a flash of lightning; at mass in the little church, while Donna Anna prayed, while Caterina, standing erect, fixed her cold eyes on the officiating priest, and the child Lorenza had prostrated herself almost to the ground in the intense humility of invocation, Luisa, absent-minded, turned casually to look at the right-hand side of the nave, where the men sat, and two other black eyes met her own, two other victorious eyes.

Later on, the same fascination had constrained her to stop in the deserted lane. Curiously enough, there had remained imprinted on her memory the picture of the big stones between which the grass grew in tall tufts, and of the

broken wall of a neighbouring garden over which peeped the top branches of a peach-tree in blossom. Trembling in the air, the soft rosy flowers seemed to smile continuously. But few words were spoken.

"Donna Luisa is much noticed at mass."

"You think so?"

"Donna Luisa has not been conscious of it, perhaps?"

"I do not notice those who waste their time."

"When those who gaze do not deserve to be noticed, on account of their inferior position."

"Such things make no difference to me."

"I know it, and it is for that I love you."

"Ah!"

"Good evening, Donna Luisa."

This was all that time.

Then came a blank period in her recollections. In truth, she had never been able to explain to herself how she allowed herself to be drawn into these nocturnal meetings, which had become regular arrangments, and had decided the course of her whole life. She had been unable to follow, step by step, the concessions made by her soul and by her senses, the double concession of herself which had caused her to hate her own home, and long for flight. Again, of these meetings she did not remember the poison that wrought conversion; she had absorbed Antonio's words unconsciously, and, little by little, they had penetrated into her brain, her nerves, her blood, and she had repeated them faithfully at the moment of action, like one in ecstasy, with un-

expected enthusiasm, with tones of conviction, as though Luisa were really imbued with new and subversive theories, while all the time it was one single fascination that explained her actions, and this fascination was absolutely material, a worship, pagan and unconferred, of Antonio's masculine beauty. Invisible caresses reached her, even when distant from his gaze, from his lips whence flowed the language of rhetoric, from his fascinating smile, from his determined expression both dominating and irritating, as if his mouth had by some strange chance obtained the power of sight.

When she had appeared before him unexpectedly on the evening of her flight, all she had said was, "Here I am."

She had spoken in a firm voice, without a tremor, without a sign of a struggle; and she had stood expecting him to clasp her, closing her eyes in the strength of her desire, awaiting his kisses, awaiting the caresses of which she had dreamed. Luisa could not wait until the usual hour; she had gone to the end of the village, as far as the *fattoria*, and Antonio, stepping up to the door of the vast hall on the ground-floor, as though obeying an irresistible call which had made itself heard in the silence, beheld her there, leaning against a tree, with her face turned to the entrance. She instantly quitted the tree, and advanced under cover of the shadow to the luminous patch formed by the door. This light had flashed up suddenly behind Antonio's shoulders. Who had lighted the lamp in the ground-floor room?

"Here I am."

Antonio, paralysed by surprise, had not moved a step towards the passion-torn woman. It is true he had talked of ties to be severed, of chains to be broken, of inextinguishable love; nevertheless, in the face of the irreparable act fear seized hold of him, dominating even the pride of his successful apostolate and his masculine self-love. He felt surprise and anxiety, and another fear, an immediate, half-physical one, caused by the vicinity of his mother. He heard her moving about in the room that had been suddenly lighted up, he heard her familiar footstep which engraved itself on his soul like a reproof and a bitter prediction.

What should he say to the old peasant, so strict in her ideas of duty, simple, and faithful to the old laws of fidelity and obedience?

He had no thought of a kiss, but the selfish one of remedying what had happened, of preventing the fulfilment of the inevitable. With this idea he argued and already accused Luisa of pushing matters too far. He did not love her for the imprudence that had led her to come to him without warning; no, he had not intended this, she had misunderstood him by passively anticipating an event concerning which he had conceived very different and more definite hopes.

"Here I am."

"You here, Luisa! Mother is within; take care."

"I was coming to her; I have come to remain. Take me to your mother, Antonio; you promised me her affection and protection."

"Not now, Luisa, not now."

"Now or to-morrow, is it not the same?"

"Go home, I entreat you, go home."

"Do you not want me?"

"Yes, I want you. But not now—be reasonable, Luisa."

"I cannot return to the castle; I have fled—*I have left them for ever.*"

Then a desperate anger uprose in his heart; in a hard voice he replied:

"Wait for me here, I must tell my mother."

He retreated into the house, closing the door. She stood waiting for him in the courtyard, shivering in the darkness, realising at last what it was she desired. But the idea of going home, of imploring forgiveness, never even occurred to her.

Some minutes passed; a streak of light approached the ill-closed door, and there followed other tiny bright gleams further off, seen through the closed shutters on the ground floor. Two agitated voices could be heard; that of the son alternately supplicating and masterful, that of the mother full of surprise and reproach.

There was a silence, then the door was opened again.

"Come," said Antonio, as he reappeared.

The girl entered; seeing no one, she asked:

"Your mother?"

"She will come later, perhaps; she is angry."

Luisa sank down on a straw chair, her eyes turned towards Antonio, thinking that it could not be he who was thus seized by an impulse to cry

out and bring accusations against the world, to cry out against himself, moved by sudden sharp contempt.

"You have not even kissed me, Antonio; now I understand, you do not love me."

"Luisa . . . ."

"You are ready to do nothing that you promised, I understand. So you are not strong, after all!"

"Luisa . . . . "

"What has happened displeases you? Speak!"

"Luisa . . . . "

Thus he replied to her, giving her no explanations, calling her three times by name in various tones of anger, anxiety, and affection. Nothing more.

"At least, call your mother; tell her that I wish to speak to her, that she must not hate me, I will be good and humble."

When she saw he did not move she repeated her request, breaking the sad and painful silence.

"Call your mother, Antonio."

"Call your mother."

Finally the young man approached the door, which opened into a long dark corridor, and with the peculiar peasant tenderness, called, nay invoked, repeatedly:

"Oh mother, come mother!"

She had at last decided to appear, her eyes red with recent tears, her bronzed face, framed in thin grey hair, was distorted and trembling with indignation. The first words she found to say to her future daughter-in-law were:

"Oh, sposa, sposa! Oh, bride! you do not bring us peace! Misery and shame enter with you."

"Mother, forgive us!"

"Marietta, I will love you as though you were my mother."

"Silence, bride, silence. You knew not how to obey your own mother, who is my mistress. God cannot bless you. Antonio, you have ruined us all."

"I will work, mother."

"You have plenty to say for yourselves, you young people, but before love should come respect for father and mother. You have lost your head; to-morrow they will send us away! To-morrow I shall have to leave this house. Ah, you did not think of Don Carlo's anger! But I think of it. You did not stop to remember that they would send away this poor old woman who for so many years served Casa Soave! I must go, do you understand? They will send me away! My son was not like this; you made him lose his head! You alone wished to be the mistress!"

"Oh, Marietta, no, no!"

"And they will send me away to-morrow, most certainly they will!"

Here the scene became painful in the extreme. Luisa stood erect, staring fixedly at the people and things around her, while Antonio was shaken with increasing despair, and Marietta rushed screaming about the room, clinging to the furniture in desperation, as if she wished to penetrate into

the walls, into the very bricks of that house, impelled by that tenacious material affection for a locality which is so characteristic of a peasant.

"Mother, calm yourself, mother; be calm!"

No, she could not listen, would not be persuaded. She was full of grief at the thought of having laboured so hard for so many years, in order suddenly to see shattered the result of all her fidelity—the shock was too great and had come upon her too suddenly. The manifestations of this grief seemed as though they would never stop, could never end. Still standing, and beginning to find herself overpowered by the vision of a future struggle approaching inexorably, Luisa already doubted Antonio's love, he who did not know how to defend her. Perhaps she felt a whispered warning of the death of her own love for him in the near future.

It was late that night before Marietta would at last consent to retire to bed. Her son accompanied her up to her room. Luisa heard them long afterwards, speaking like two persons who were quarrelling, walking up and down and causing the wooden floor to creak above her head.

She waited, by the light of the smoky little lamp, in the large ground-floor room. When Antonio reappeared, with a white face, the girl rose. She, too, was pale; she moved to meet him, but could not speak—not a word. Only at the door of the little bedroom conceded her by a forced hospitality, Luisa recovered her feelings. She flung herself on Antonio's sturdy breast,

encircling him with her arms and saying, "After all, you are mine, I am not afraid. You are beautiful; oh, how beautiful you are!"

As was expected, Don Carlo Soave gave the Valentio warning; this happened on the morning of the next day.

They entered the service of the Marchesi Rovere, who were good but not rich, and drew little, almost nothing in fact, from their small possessions. Still, the *fattoria*, which became the home of Luisa Valenti, was pretty; there was a rustic serenity about it that was not without charm, and the girl's fancy might have been attracted by it, had it not been for the hostility of her mother-in-law. Yet she could find nothing wherewith to reproach Luisa—she never alluded to her former position, she even seemed to despise it, changing her dress and manners, taking up voluntarily all the occupations of her new position, adapting herself to her surroundings, nay, more, attending to her novel duties as though they were her choice. It was thus that Antonio once more fell under the charm of that tall figure, which looked all the more regal in the useless humility of the simple peasant's dress; it was a new beauty, which acquired power by force of contrast.

During the first months of their marriage Luisa and Antonio went out together to look after the field work. This was the pretext, in reality it was, by tacit understanding, to escape Marietta's vigilance. They walked quickly, in the lanes, in the fields, beside the torrent, side by side, with-

out stopping, now and then exchanging a furtive glance. She wore a short cotton petticoat, a red handkerchief tied over her black hair, and a shawl which half covered her shoulders was crossed over her bosom and knotted behind her waist. But it was easy to see she was, even thus, a lady—it seemed as though, for a joke, she had put on peasant's costume. Seeing her thus, he perceived in her new seductions which flattered his ambitious peasant soul. Her face, bronzed by the sun's keen rays, brought out in relief the glow of her crimson lips, and her white teeth, which she showed when she laughed. The bronze colour of her face reached her chin and toned off towards her throat, where it marked a sharp line, showing suddenly, where the shawl opened above her breast, the white, firm, healthy skin of a strong young being. Further, there were her little hands, also sun-burnt, like a glove which reached the wrist and faded towards the elbow, while beneath the cotton skirt appeared the tiny feet, which retained all the aristocracy of their minute elegance which Luisa refused to sacrifice in the peasant's wooden shoes.

Antonio always gave orders in his commanding voice, with the tone of severity usual to him. He superintended the peasants and directed the work. Luisa stopped to speak to the women, who were shy with her. She did not disdain to take up the hoe, to loosen the earth, to inspect the bundles of hay, to bend down and caress the babies left lying in the shade of the hedges by their mothers, whose

astonished eyes reflected the blazing sun which so exhausted their parents. They passed on through the cornfields, through the furrows, along the narrow paths. Luisa's skirt brushed against the fragile stems, sweeping over groups of iris, blue eyes set in the golden light of the sun, over the blood-red bunches of big poppies. She would sometimes gather one of these, placing it in her breast, whilst biting the stalk of another. Thus they went on, Luisa in front, Antonio following, devouring her with his eyes. They would pause in the depths of the grove ; here at least they were really alone, here they truly belonged to each other without fear of surprise. Around them grew the wild tall grass and slender young trees, whose branches kissed and interlaced, mingling their thick leaves. There was an endless murmur, a confused hum, countless warblings ; here were colossal spider-webs, houses of finest filaments gilded by the rays of the sun, here was an enervating and all-pervading perfume of flowering acacias.

Here all was love, love all-subduing, all-commanding. She would throw herself on the green-sward and turn to him with half-closed eyes, and he grew tender as he noted the rays of love that filtered through the long black lashes. Then at last a spark of gratitude awoke in his heart ; after all, she has sacrificed herself for him. He had almost commanded this sacrifice, and she had made it with a strength that was marvellous, for her renunciation was so complete that it appeared like entire forgetfulness. He had never heard her

complain, never had the bitterness of contrast brought a word to those burning lips which only seemed to long for kisses, nothing but kisses. Oh, they deserved them, for the sake of their power and their beauty, and he longed to intoxicate, to stun, to suffocate her with kisses, mingled with wild words of passion, words savage and tender, such as Luisa loved to hear.

And she always returned his kisses, in her pagan adoration.

"I love you, I adore you; kiss me again, you are beautiful, beautiful."

They returned home at dusk, when everything at the *fattoria* was about to rest for the night. Marietta was in the courtyard, meeting the cattle returning from pasture. She watched the grave cows as they passed, counted the sheep, the goats, and the restless pigs, and then closed the stables.

Luisa approached her respectfully.

"Good evening, mother."

"Sposa, good evening."

Antonio passed, saying too:

"Good evening, mother."

The old peasant woman smiled diffidently, the smile of a peasant who believes firmly in God and still more firmly in the works of the devil. She returned into the house to attend to the supper. Luisa assisted her, passing to and fro from the orchard to the kitchen, where the great kettle sang its familiar song, from the little courtyard where the hens were about to go to roost, to the kitchen,

where she set the table, humbly asking to be allowed to work and to assist yet more.

Marietta refused to yield, to let herself be touched, her jealousy caused her to think:

"Luisa would be mistress here."

Her blunt good sense made her reason with herself:

"Now, I cannot reprove her, and as long as the love lasts . . . . Witch! She eats up my son's time. Witch! Witch! Wait until you tire of being a peasant; yes, yes, now I say nothing. As long as love lasts!"

Marietta dwelt with bitter joy on this thought of the death of love.

"Afterwards!"

This was how it came about. Marietta had a presentiment, Marietta thought of the future, and that was what she could not forgive her daughter-in-law.

The future.

But what future?

It was the hour of bedtime. With the same respect, the same gentleness, Luisa approached her mother-in-law, saluting her and wishing her:

"Good night, mother."

And the old woman replied, with her invariable diffidence:

"Good night, sposa."

The painful question of money made itself manifest with the birth of Peppino—manifest, for it had always been present covertly. Every now

and again, when Luisa was not there, Marietta would take her son aside and say to him :

" Are you not thinking about the money ? "

Antonio had always thought about it, eagerly, but he was a speechmaker and was ashamed to confess it. He feigned indignation.

" You know right well that I never think about it."

Marietta winced ; there was ever present with her that belief in the devil which overcame her faith in God.

" As you like, my dear son ; it may be so, but I do not believe it."

" Mother, you offend me ! "

" Nonsense ! You must have reckoned upon it, even if you did not know it."

" What do you mean ? "

" Your wife might make us rich, you know that well."

" Be quiet, mother ; money from Casa Soave shall never enter here ! "

" All money is alike, my dear son, and to give your mother peace you may well think of it."

" I am here to help you."

"All very well, as far as you go. But certainly it is not with the fine words you learned in those few years at school . . . . no, certainly it is not with those fine words that you will help your mother. Go ! you are an ungrateful son ! "

" Mother ! "

" You have forgotten all my sacrifices."

" I swear to you . . . . "

"Do not swear, go to—do not swear. When your father died I ought to have listened to the priest, I ought to have taken you away from the school directly and made you work like the others. Instead, I took the bread out of my own mouth, I worked myself to skin and bone to send you to town; you wanted to study, to turn the world upside down, to do I know not what, and you came back to me with no wish to do anything, full of mad ideas—you are neither a peasant nor a scholar!"

"I will go to America, I will go abroad and seek my fortune."

"Well! well! I thought you had found an America here when you made this fine marriage."

"I did not marry Luisa for her money."

"Then why did you bring her here into my house?"

"We married because we loved each other?"

"One cannot eat love, my son. The Signor Marchese is kind, but with the Roveres it is not possible to earn anything. Don Carlo, who knows when he will die? There will be money then, but I shall not be here! Meantime, life is very hard!"

"I will go to America, mother."

"That's a fine song you've learnt! And when will you go?"

"At once!"

"A pretty business! With a wife like yours, and a little child! And, tell me, do you never

think of your mother? Will you let me die like a dog?"

"I shall go alone."

"I understand; you will desert us all three, you will let your mother and your son die of hunger. That other one will save herself; she has run away once, she will take flight again."

"That is enough, mother; do you hear? Enough of this!"

"I am your mother, and I will speak. Listen to me! Stay and take care of your wife; keep close to her, that woman wants watching."

"Luisa is a good woman."

"Now; but when you are gone . . . ."

"She is safe with you, mother."

"I am too old to play guardian."

"There is no need, she knows I should kill her."

"But why will you not arrange things otherwise?"

"There is nothing else to be done."

"Let that proud thing bow her head. If Don Carlo refuses she might always have recourse to Donna Anna, who is an angel."

"She cannot apply to her, she is ill; she never leaves the house, does not even go to mass."

"But there are the sisters. Donna Caterina . . . ."

"Mother, do not talk to me of Donna Caterina, she is wicked."

"Donna Lorenza . . . ."

"She is a child, and stupid besides."

"Try, nevertheless; speak to your wife."

"I have already said no."

"I shall speak to her."

"I forbid you, mother; I forbid you!"

What did this violent outburst of anger mean? Disinterestedness? No. A fear of distressing Luisa's love? No, nor dignity either. It was the terror of the sham apostle, the fear of being unmasked.

And the mother, who understood, found the vulgar invective adapted to this vulgar fear.

"You will not really, you will not?"

"I will not, I will not."

"Then you will die of hunger!"

"Do not drive me out of my senses! I have told you that I will work."

"For yourself, but you will let others die of hunger."

"Ah, by the most Holy! Ah, miserable that I am! Ah, by . . . ."

Antonio Valenti departed in *pique*, departed without faith, without security, trusting to chance, departed in the stupid mania of creating for himself a sort of halo in the eyes of his mother, who exasperated him, and of his wife, of whom he began to tire. At the moment of parting a feeling of anger dominated the pain of separation; he felt as if he hated those two women.

It was they who obliged him to go—they, his mother and his wife. He detested them because unconsciously they had forced him to take this step, the one humiliating him by insults, the

other humiliating him by dignified force of character.

Antonio Valenti departed for very shame and stupid pride, staying away nearly two years.

These two years of waiting became engraven on the heart, the mind, the senses of Luisa.

Marietta's persecution began immediately. She tormented her daughter-in-law with a thousand accusations, trying to prove that she, and she alone, was the cause of Antonio's unfortunate absence. Yes, yes, it was due to the misplaced pride of Luisa, who would not appeal to her own people to aid her new family; she was a bad wife, a bad mother, a bad daughter-in-law.

Surprise and indignation endowed Luisa with heroic powers of silence.

Marietta appeared disarmed, but it was only seeming. She continued her persecutions, which had only changed their character. The furious flow of words had given place to a constant and active espionage, for ever vigilant, and rendered yet more dangerous by great dissimulation.

Nothing escaped the concentrated violence of this unjust hatred. Every word spoken by Luisa, every look, every smile, the colour of her gowns, the kerchief she knew how to tie so prettily over her black hair, her coming and going—all, all were observed and judged as sins. If she was attentive to the child, if she caressed him, if she paid him less attention, if afterwards she was inclined to exaggerated tenderness or to careless neglect, if she

went to church in the evening and with whom—all this was watched, and in silence, while Luisa felt herself surrounded by an ever-increasing pitiless hostility.

Whither had fled her passionate pride? And how quickly was her love for the absent dying?

Whither had vanished the dreams of riches?

There did exist, in very truth, an inexorable law of punishment against which strength of character was shattered, and which turned patience and self-forgetfulness into ironical and useless qualities.

Ah, the little arms of Peppino were sweet and heavenly things! She placed them round her neck like a fresh, living necklace of purity! She tightened them around her throat, giving herself up to the pure pleasure, pressing her mouth, which longed to sob, on the smiling, rosy face of the child, and finding therein the sweetest distraction.

Beyond the *fattoria*, on the other side of the garden, stood a pretty little house, a sort of chalêt. In front of the house was a small garden, with well-kept paths and symmetrical beds, the noisy poetry of a fountain rose in the centre, and a handsome iron gate with gilt spikes enclosed the whole.

This pretty little house belonged to Gabriele dei Rovida, a handsome young man of whom strange tales were told in the neighbourhood.

It was no romance, that is to say, there had been a romance in the beginning, but after the mystery ceased all seemed natural. He was a foundling brought up by the Rovidas, rich tenant farmers of

the neighbouring village of Roccalta; he had been a servant, an underling, then all at once he had freed himself with cold-blooded determination from all ties of gratitude, and had become a self-made man. It was said he had enriched himself by smuggling, not a difficult thing to do so near to Switzerland. First he had bought a small horse, then a little carriage, then he began to breed dogs, which were often chased and sometimes paid for their master's cleverness with their lives. He had assistants too, a sort of battalion of dependants. Finally he had bought land, and had built himself the little house.

This house, with its door always closed, its green blinds always down, its garden always deserted, breathed an air of mystery, but of romantic mystery.

"There lives the invisible princess," said the peasants, as they passed.

And they laughed, remembering Gabriele's taciturn old servant, his only companion, the only inhabitant of the cottage during the master's long absences. Some years ago he had taken to travelling, always returning more elegant and more eccentric than before. He might then be seen walking about the country, never greeting his companions of other days, not heeding even the richer people of the place, for whom, however, he had a certain smile that hovered between cunning and contempt.

Nothing led people to suppose that he was bad, nothing gave them cause to believe that he was good. He was handsome and silent, that was all,

two qualities which made the girls turn to look after him as he passed.

Little by little the peasant was transformed into the gentleman, transformed in dress, walk, and manner. Some held that the handsome Gabriele dei Rovida had found his parents, who were rich and distinguished people, others held that he had extended the limits of his trade. No one could speak evil of him with any certainty.

Thus there was no real romance, scarcely even an appearance of mystery.

That year Gabriele was absent all winter. When he reappeared in the village one May morning, the first person he saw, as he sat by the fountain in his garden, was Luisa Valenti. He saw her in the distance, through the iron gate, beyond the low wall of the neighbouring orchard. He noticed her standing on the wooden balcony of the *fattoria* as she was hanging out the clothes, drawn up to her full height, raising herself on tiptoe to reach the line suspended between the posts. The bright sun shone on her red kerchief, her black hair, and her beautiful face. Gabriele gazed at her as though she had been close beside him, distinguishing her beauty and her proud bearing. She, though distant, felt the sensation of being looked at, and turned towards the orchard, but seeing no one, she drew back and disappeared.

Months passed before Gabriele thought of her again.

Then he beheld her one evening as she was returning from church, carrying Peppino in her

arms. She seemed to him a *Mater Dolorosa*. But this time also Luisa did not notice Gabriele.

Nevertheless the young man, much impressed, followed her to the door of the *fattoria*, and afterwards could not banish her from his thoughts. Several evenings in succession he stationed himself in the lane, hoping, as she passed again that way, to see that melancholy mother holding a beautiful boy in her arms. But she did not pass again. Had she changed her road, or did she no longer go to church in the evening? The other women, returning in groups from Benediction, laughing and talking, glanced at each other in astonishment on seeing Gabriele, and turned to look at him. A few girls walking alone, decorated with the blue ribbon of the daughters of Mary, brushed by him without seeing him, leaving behind them a vague perfume of incense, which seemed to emanate from their clothes. After them followed the few men who went to church in the evening. They were, for the most part, old men, wearing the linen habit and cord of the brotherhood. But *she* never passed him again.

In the course of the day Gabriele halted several times before the big gate of the *fattoria*, as though by accident, looking into the courtyard. At the foot of the gigantic walnut-tree a few hens were scratching, superintended by a majestic cock; carts, with their shafts raised, looking like Turks at prayer, ladders leaning against the wall or the haystacks; these he saw, but never a living soul. And Gabriele would come away feeling

weary, as though exhausted by some great moral struggle.

Then came the afternoon when an inspiration seized him. He was standing beside the low wall that divided the garden of the châlet from the orchard of the *fattoria*, and across the wall could be heard the joyous cries of a happy child. It was this innocent and noisy infantile gaiety that gave birth to his idea.

It must certainly be Peppino who was shouting thus, and probably his mother was not far distant. Indeed, as soon as he had accomplished the easy scramble over the low wall, Gabriele perceived Luisa, her back turned towards him, sitting on a grass-grown step. He guessed that she was smiling, and truly so she was, smiling at Peppino, who came towards her all alone, up the little path, balancing himself with difficulty on his inexpert little legs. Tottering thus he looked like a Chinese figure, and as he stumbled along he was seized with the convulsive delight of a child who is half-afraid and half-amused at his own fear.

Gabriele divined the maternal smile, and thought of the light that must be playing in her eyes. He closed his own instinctively, like a person who is dazzled.

Luisa was not wearing her usual red kerchief, hence her black braids were visible; the uncovered nape of her neck showed a soft curve, her shoulders had a statuesque outline. Hardly had the child reached her when Gabriele called out:

"Donna Luisa!"

"How long it was since any one had named her thus! She gave an angry start, put the child on the ground, and turned quickly with flashing eyes.

"You, Signor Gabriele? What do you want with me?"

The young man looked at her with such ardour that her eyelids quivered, as though she felt the effect of a fierce light.

"I wish to speak to you."

"On your own account?"

"No, for some one at the Castle."

Luisa grew pale.

"Tell me what it is!" she cried, not suspecting the falsehood.

"Not now, your mother-in-law must know nothing."

"That is true. And when, then?"

"Come this evening for a moment."

"Where to?"

"To the little door opening into the fields."

"I will come at nine; will that do?"

"Very well; do not fail, it is something very important."

"Madonna!" murmured Luisa, while the young man slid skilfully down the other side of the wall, not wishing to weaken the strong impression he had made.

At nine o'clock Luisa crossed the courtyard, which was dark and quiet, pushed open the small wooden door and found herself in the orchard, which was also dark and plunged in silence. Keeping close to the wall, she reached the second

wooden door, which opened into the fields, and hardly had she opened it when the tall and elegant form of Gabriele appeared before her. Then for the first time her suspicions were aroused.

"Good evening, Donna Luisa."

"I salute you, Signor Gabriele. Is it Donna Caterina, my sister, who has sent you?"

"No."

"It is Donna Anna, perhaps?" and there was a tremor in the voice which had once found such angry tones in which to reproach her mother's weakness.

"No, Donna Luisa."

"Speak, in God's name!"

Suddenly Gabriele seized her hand and said:

"Yes, I wanted to speak to you; to tell you that I love you madly, that you have bewitched me, and that you must love me too."

"Ah!"

"Do not be frightened, my beauty, do not scream; listen! Remember that you must love me, because my love for you is great enough to burn up your heart as well as mine."

"If you do not let me go I will scream and will call for help!"

"No; you will not scream and will not call for help, because Gabriele will not let you."

"I beg you, I pray you, let me go!"

"Dearest, with that frightened voice of yours you will make me commit some great act of folly! Dearest, you must swear that you will come back to-morrow night."

"Go away, I hate the sight of you! Oh, heaven!"

"You think so now, but you will end by loving me, I tell you, because you will not let me die! I shall come back every night until I have persuaded you."

"Never, never, never!"

"Yes, you will come. I shall be here every evening to wait for you, and you will not be able to bear the thought of my standing here at this gate, waiting, languishing for you, dying for you, like a desperate and doomed man."

"No!"

"You will end by coming."

"No, no, no."

"Do not say no again, if you do not wish me to kiss that mouth that is killing me!"

She was silent, paralysed; but it was useless, for Gabriele took her suddenly by the shoulders and kissed her, kissed her passionately on the mouth, and she felt unable to resist.

"Look at her, how frightened she is, this darling, all because of a kiss. Where is the harm? I am as good as Valenti!"

Ah, there was the rub! *As good as Valenti.* Terrible, terrible words, which had been spoken as if to show her that indignation was useless, since she had voluntarily abased herself and brought herself down to the level of this adventure.

I am as good as Valenti.

Six dreadful words, which were at one and the same time an insult, an explanation, and a justification.

"Until to-morrow night, my joy, my beauty."

"Never; I hate you!"

"We shall see, we shall see, my sweet."

At last! She had closed again that accursed little door; she could go in and think that she had dreamed, and pray to be allowed to forget her dream.

When her daughter-in-law reappeared in the kitchen, Marietta cried:

"Oh, Sposa, how pale you are!"

"I feel ill."

"I can see it. And where have you come from?"

"From the orchard."

"Or from the fields?"

"From the orchard."

"From the fields, I think," said Marietta emphasising her words.

Luisa looked at her mother-in-law, startled.

"You think what is false," replied the young daughter-in-law.

"I will make you pay for those words," said Marietta, revealing her true self.

"You think I have sinned?" asked Luisa, and her words were the cry of an honest soul that fears the future.

"Either you have done wrong or you will do it," answered the old woman.

"It pleases you to be a bird of ill-omen," muttered Luisa bitterly.

"I tell you, Sposa, that you were the bird of ill-omen when you entered my house. You have

taken my son's love and respect from me, and now you have sent him far away to . . . . "

"Oh, mother, take care what you say."

"To rob him of his honour. Rather take care, you, woman without thought and without religion."

"Holy Virgin, protect me!"

"Only now you remember the Madonna?"

"I have none left, no one who loves me!"

"Weep by all means! You would have it so!"

"It is true, I would have it so; you are right. It is just. Ah, my poor Peppino, my poor Peppino!"

"You are setting a fine example to your son!"

"But I have done nothing wrong! I swear it!"

"Done wrong—you? What a notion! You are a saint. . . . . I have always wanted to tell you that you are a saint."

Launching these ironical words at her, the mother-in-law left the room, leaving Luisa quite dazed. When the poor girl could collect her senses again she ascended the stairs to her bedroom and kissed the child, who was sleeping peacefully. She then opened the window and leaned out into the fresh night air. Opposite, in the pretty cottage, there was also a lighted window, only one, and in the light Luisa saw a shadow that waved a greeting towards the farmhouse, and could perceive that it was the shadow of a man.

She hastily closed the window, and then threw herself on her bed, sobbing like a creature in torment.

Several evenings passed.

But recollection, instead of fading, grew stronger in Luisa's brain. She was no longer angry, no longer indignant, her revolted morality was no longer offended. And with the death of the painful surprise, a curious change occurred. All the actuality of that scene was recalled, strong and interesting, in clear outline. Working beside her mother-in-law, who never spoke to her, Luisa once more saw Gabriele's fine face bent towards her, once more she felt the pressure of his hands and felt her shoulders seized with that tender yet savage passion which at bottom pleased her, for it was like her own. She saw again the flashing eyes which reflected the audacious thoughts, the sensual lips ready to commit the audacity, and once again, in this involuntary evocation, she felt the scorching contact of that kiss. She seemed to burn all over, the excitement brought a flush into her cheeks and suffused her neck with a deeper colour and she trembled visibly.

"*You must love me, because my love for you is great enough to burn up your heart as well as mine.*"

A sudden terror caused her to start. If this should really happen? But how could she be so wicked as even to imagine it possible? Was her pagan worship of beauty about to ruin her a second time?

"*I am as good as Valenti!*"

Ah! Gabriele was much handsomer than Antonio! Handsomer! She even dared to think of this! she, an honest woman who had a child to love.

" You will end by coming ! "

God would not allow her to fulfil this evil prophecy ; she would break the sinful charm, would smother the nascent seduction.

And did he really come every evening ? Was he really so madly constant ? Had he been again sometimes ? Had he stayed away ? If . . . .

Was it true ? Had she really no power to resist thinking of that person who was perhaps awaiting her ?

" You will not be able to bear the thought, knowing that I am here at this door waiting for you, languishing for you, dying, like a desperate and doomed man."

Languishing. Dying.

They were the sort of words Antonio made use of in his love-making. Familiar words, which could deceive her no longer. She knew then, knew too well, what they were worth and that she could not count on them. Therefore the charm lay not in them ; it was no delirium born of the exaltation produced by what had been said. There was, then, in the birth of this second passion, a force stronger than that which had first led her astray. How could she despise herself enough, knowing already that she would be so vile as to go to Gabriele ?

No.

Perhaps not.

Perhaps he had already ceased to come ; perhaps he had never returned at all.

How many evenings had passed since *that one ?*

Better have done with it. Then there came an evening when Luisa, tired of the inward struggle, rose from her seat, to all appearance calm. She wished to make sure, to know, to know whether the danger of sin was a foolish terror, or whether she was on the point of finding herself face to face with the inevitable sin.

She walked slowly across the kitchen, slowly mounted the stairs up to the first floor, mounted to the second story more rapidly, and flew up the little flight leading to the garret. She placed her small lamp on the floor; she felt half-choked, and remained quiet for a moment, then, with infinite precautions, she opened the shutters of the single window.

Gabriele would certainly never suppose that she had gone up there to look for him.

She hesitated a while. Surely he was not there, could not be; he had certainly grown tired by now. Ah, how she would thank God if it were so!

She decided; leaned her head out, looked, saw nothing . . . . looked again.

He was there.

Marietta had been ill some days, and Luisa nursed her with untiring patience. The eyes of the sick woman persistently followed every movement of the younger one, and often, when fixed on her daughter-in-law, there came into Marietta's eyes an expression of intense hatred. When Luisa approached the door to leave the room,

called elsewhere by various occupations, the old woman struggled with a lively sense of anxiety. Oh, not to be able to follow her, to play the spy, to persecute her still! Where was she going?

Day by day the sick woman grew weaker, every day it became more difficult for her to speak, from hour to hour the paralysis progressed. Where was Luisa, where did she go when she was not beside her? This was the question that tormented Marietta, this was the thought that was bitter as wormwood to her soul. And if she should lose the use of speech? If she were not able to warn Antonio? If she were to die without leaving a trace of her hatred behind her? To die without avenging herself! Not to know how to write, not to have any one to confide in . . . . ah, yes! The priest.

But the priest would have remained silent by the obligation of pardon; the duties of his mission.

Had Luisa both God and the devil on her side?

In very deed the sick woman lost the power of speech suddenly, as the doctor had predicted, when asking for something to drink. Then Marietta's eyes became fearful; she kept them always open, and there was no pain, no terror in them, only hatred. When Luisa approached the bedside, and met this terrible gaze she shuddered from head to foot.

Then there came a moment when Luisa, placed between these two tortures—the incessant attraction towards sin and those eyes which cursed her

—felt an over-mastering need of love, a need of kisses and caresses, a need of finding herself with some person who would at least give her the illusion of love.

It was nine o'clock in the evening, the hour when Gabriele waited for her.

A peasant neighbour was upstairs attending to the sick woman. Luisa could go out without fear, and she went.

As usual, he was waiting for her; directly he saw her he gave a deep sigh, but the only words he spoke were: "You have made me suffer much."

Then he seized her hand abruptly and kissed it, and, still holding her hand, drew her after him with a gentleness of which she would not have supposed him capable, and which completed her conquest.

It seemed as if Luisa would have halted a little. Did she wish to go back? Did she repent? Gabriele passed his arm round her waist, still drawing her on.

"Come, darling, come."

"Where are we going?"

"To my house. Come, darling."

"Gabriele," murmured Luisa, surprised at finding herself unintentionally calling him by name.

"Dear Treasure!"

They were already at the garden gate.

When they entered the lighted entrance hall Gabriele left hold of Luisa, still gazing at her with blazing eyes and blissful excitement. He then put

up the door-chain, returned to her, and taking her in his arms like a child, although she was tall and strong, carried her upstairs and, still holding her in his arms, he entered the sitting-room and placed her on a sofa. For a moment she let her eyes wander around the room, dazzled and stupefied by the luxury that surrounded her; Gabriele smiled. She felt weary, so weary, and stretching herself out full length on the sofa, she laid her dark head against the cushions, their silken rustle murmured in her ears, and she closed her eyes.

Then Gabriele smiled again, and drew nearer, nearer, yet nearer. Strange to tell, this athlete was gentleness itself in all sensual matters. He kissed her softly, softly, on her closed eyelids, on her neck and cheeks, gently undoing her braids of hair. At last he sought her lips, and ceased there. Those dark, loosened tresses were like a mystic helmet.

After loving the man, to whom she abandoned herself entirely, she began also to love his home. When the first intoxication of the senses had passed, Luisa looked around, conquered by the charm of outward things. It was a detailed elegance that reigned here, studied in trifles rather than in mass. It was evident that these objects had been acquired little by little, perhaps one by one, and placed there, with the love of collecting; arms, antique plates, precious cups, furniture of voluptuous suggestion. How had he been able to buy all this? How had this foundling accumulated

such riches, he who had been brought up frugally on the limited generosity of a family of tenant-farmers ?

This did not resemble the austere wealth of the Castle, the severe, antique magnificence of the Soaves ; it was modern, a medley, fantastic and luxurious, rather than in perfect taste. But it pleased Luisa ; she liked men of statuesque beauty, and, perhaps because of the contrast, she liked objects that were *bizarre*.

Gabriele, who possessed the ingenuous vanity of the self-made man, watched her resting, still extended on the sofa.

" You like it, do you not ? " he asked.

" Yes, I like it."

" You did not think I was so rich ? "

" No, I did not expect it."

The reply evidently flattered him.

" Yet it does not satisfy me, it is not enough ; I want to be enormously rich."

She continued to look about her, then, rising at last, she began to rebraid her hair, while he continued his confidences, which were those of a lonely, ambitious, and fastidious man.

" If you knew, Luisa, how I require luxury ; nothing ever satisfies me. I have always been like that. I am not yet thirty ; I can do much. I have a passion for luxury ; it is in my blood. When I travel I am consumed by a fever to know, to purchase. I should like to have everything, everything ! It is in the blood, I tell you. Ah, when I make up my mind to a thing, when I am really resolved ! "

As he spoke his dark blue eyes grew almost fierce. It was evident he was a being capable of anything to gain his ends. Luisa's soul was not revolted, her passionate soul was not indignant. And why ? Because her soul was absent.

"It is in the blood, for I am a bastard."

He said this in the same proud tones an aristocrat might use in speaking of his forbears.

"And my father must be a prince."

It pleased him to think this, perhaps he believed it.

"I do not mind being a bastard, you know. Fewer ties, my dear, no duties ; one manages for oneself without owing thanks to any one. My money is as good as a certificate of birth."

He laughed.

"If I met my mother I should laugh in her face, I should not care if my mother were to die of hunger. Each in his turn, you see!"

His was a logical cynicism. Luisa's soul remained absent.

When she wished to get up, to go away, it was no, no, he did not want her to go so soon ; she must take something—sweets, wine ; for since she understood him she must stay on, he had so much yet to say. He loved none but her, she alone pleased him ; according to him, they had many points of contact in character, had shown almost the same courage—she in lowering herself, he in upraising himself.

Nor did even this comparison offend Luisa ; who knows, perhaps she did not even listen. She

stroked Gabriele's hair as he knelt before her, trying to force her into accepting some refreshment with persistent gallantry.

"A drop of malaga, Luisa, a biscuit—at least a drop of malaga; don't make me angry, Luisa."

She refused. There was only one thing she cared to know—whether, in truth, he had waited for her every night.

"Why, certainly, every night."

"Many hours?"

"Many hours."

When she heard this reply she kissed him once more on the lips. But how could he be so patient?

He ended by laughing at this curiosity, this astonishment.

"A great deed, verily! Fancy, I passed many nights stretched on the grass, many nights I lay in ambush surrounded by danger, with revenue officers at my heels, fearing neither imprisonment nor death! And you wonder that I have patience to wait for the only woman who ever stirred my heart!"

One idea only was clear to Luisa, the flattering thought of his material constancy. Thus she did not stop to note the brutality betrayed in this obstinate and characteristic smuggler's pride.

"Would you like to take something away with you? Tell me."

"No, Gabriele."

"Ask me for something; do you really want nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Another time, then, for you will return, will you not?"

"Yes, I will return."

She promised this unhesitatingly, knowing she would not be able to resist the desire to return.

This absence of hesitation and of repentance pleased him, and he told her so. She had now risen definitely and was really leaving. While Gabriele was accompanying her back Luisa was amazed to find herself so tranquil. Truly, since the soul was absent, the mind and senses were in a state of absolute calm, nay, indeed, the mind was satisfied, and the senses, almost dominated by the sin, were reposing.

In front of the little door, Luisa, embracing him for the last time, heard the clock strike and shuddered.

It was midnight.

Hardly had she entered the kitchen when she found herself confronted by the woman who had been left to watch Marietta.

"Oh, Signora Luisa, we have been looking for you all over!"

"I was taken ill in the orchard."

"Oh, poor dear Signora! you have done too much these last days; go to bed at once. We were looking for you because Marietta is certainly very ill; if you only saw her eyes!"

Luisa started.

"Eyes like those of the damned! I was afraid to stay alone; I called Monica, and then Rosetta came too; they are up there now. You go

straight to bed, Signora, we will look after Marietta."

Luisa hesitated a moment, then terror at the throught of again meeting those terrible eyes, that now had a right to accuse her, overcame her pity. She went upstairs in the dark, passed the sick woman's door on tiptoe, and entered her own room.

The calm breathing of the child was audible.

Ah, no! she could not immediately look at the innocent little face. She undressed in the dark, and before she slept she felt a passing horror of herself.

She returned every evening for months and months, attracted by Gabriele, attracted by the objects in that house. During the day she remained constantly with Marietta, who no longer frightened her because her eyes had become extinguished also, and were henceforth incapable of reflecting any thought or expression at all. It was the death-agony prolonged for months; it was a body which Luisa tended with a gratitude that was natural yet terrible, a silent hymn of gratitude to this dying body, almost motionless, which had *let the soul escape* and could no longer work harm.

Could no longer work harm, ... what a relief! what a fierce sense of freedom!

No one suspected Luisa; she knew how to appear so active, so skilful in all those occupations which now inspired her with disgust. Absolute

disgust. She did all this because she forced herself to believe that by day she was tormented in dreams; thus she could drag through the hours until evening; she liked to awaken then to love. Whether this were love of the soul or of the senses she did not stop to consider—she knew just enough of it to feel its life and not enough to suffer its corrosion, which originates in the canker of self-analysis. This, for her, was love, and it sufficed her.

Thus, pretending to dream by day, Luisa awoke, in a pagan way, at evening, when she found herself beside Gabriele. When all believed her to be sleeping, worn out by the fatigues of the day, and the women watching beside the invalid chanted her praises in low voices, she was with her lover, staying with him many hours and holding strange colloquies. They spoke of Valenti, who rarely wrote and who might return any day; it was not known if he had made money out there, or how he lived. They talked of him calmly, while Gabriele smoked and turned over the leaves of illustrated magazines, French and English. He did not understand them, but, like a child, he was pleased with the pictures and invented fantastic translations suggested by the expressions of the figures.

Luisa, when interrogated, corrected and explained, but she would not do it always; she had forgotten many English words . . . . among the many things she had forgotten. So much the better, she had grown coarse. Yes, so much the better!

She touched the silken curtains, the refined Luisa, she who had forgotten her soul, to educate her senses; she placed her hand upon the satins, on the velvet armchairs, rolling up the sleeves of her dress that her arms, her elbows, might come in contact with that smooth softness, might feel the yielding caress of the velvet. She liked to drink coffee out of delicate china cups with thin brims, to sip liqueur, drop by drop, from tiny glasses of real crystal, she even tried to smoke cigarettes.

"You were born for luxury," Gabriele told her, "you should have been a queen; you have missed your way," and he smiled as he spoke.

She shrugged her shoulders, enjoying the present moment with no thought of the future. She afforded herself, gave herself; Gabriele inspired her with no moral modesty. She grew to love him more and more, completely enchanted, losing her head in ecstasy through the total absence of impediments, as another might have been excited by the prolonged anguish of an obstinate refusal.

For months and months matters proceeded thus, until the return of Valenti was imminent, and Marietta was dying; her son was to find her dead.

Gabriele no longer spoke of going away; often, without letting his intentions be suspected, he dreamed of selling his house and possessions and flying with Luisa. She did not divine this; she went on in the usual way, dreaming her bad dream

by day and waking at night when the hour of sin approached for which she longed.

Reality reasserted its rights over her when she noticed . . . .

It came over her one evening, and, quivering in every limb, she put her hands on his shoulders and, looking into his eyes, she told him all.

He was not a man to be easily moved, and as he really loved her he was not even annoyed. Indeed his eyes kindled, he was seized by a wild impulse of love, he was glad.

"Ah, truly, now I am happy! Now I will carry you off directly, *both of you*," he cried, "what is there to be afraid of? Both, you, and *he* or *she*. Are you not glad? Tell me the truth, did you not expect it? Did you not know I loved you so much? You did not think me capable of that! Are you not glad? Do not you want to come away with Gabriele? Do you not trust me?"

Luisa gazed at him, thunderstruck. Go away with him? Another flight, another rending of ties of blood.

"Will you not come? Why do you not answer? Are you not happy with Gabriele?"

"Yes, I am happy with you."

"Then consent."

"I do not know."

"What, not know! I can give you riches, love, peace, I offer to make you mine, to take you away for ever, and you tell me you . . . . do not know. Either you do not love me, or you doubt my word."

"Neither the one nor the other."

"Then explain yourself, strange being that you are! Explain yourself; you will drive me mad with your mysteries."

"Do not be angry, Gabriele."

"Then speak."

"I am ready to come with you . . . ."

"At last!"

"Yes, but . . . ."

"But?"

"I repeat that I am ready to abandon all and everything if you will let me bring Peppino."

"Peppino? The son of that other man? Never. Ah, my God!"

"Peppino is mine; I will not leave him."

"What are you asking? Do you suppose that I have water in my veins, that I will quietly let myself die of jealousy, while . . . . No, no, that I never could bear. The companionship of a child of mine with a child of *the other!* You have not yet discovered, then, that I am capable of committing murder, I am so jealous?"

"Then I shall be obliged to bid you farewell."

"Farewell to me? But—but, Luisa, it is not possible. I have a right to help you, to love you, to think for my child."

"Gabriele, if you are savage in jealousy I am savage in motherhood. I have a fierce love for Peppino, and I shall have the same for our child. I will never abandon my children. Remember this!"

"I shall steal my child from you, so take care!"

"You will not ruin me because I have loved you, Gabriele?"

"You will ruin yourself by remaining here. Is not Antonio coming? Antonio will avenge himself. You see that it is not possible for you to stay."

"Will you let me bring Peppino?"

"Curses on the boy!"

"Gabriele!"

"No! a thousand times no!"

"Permit it, Gabriele, permit it! He is little; he will not remember; he will grow fond of you and will believe you to be his father."

"Luisa! I have said no! In God's name do not make me blaspheme; do not change my love into poison."

"Then all is over, Gabriele."

"Oh, Luisa, obstinate woman; and wherefore?"

"Because, between my son and you, I choose my son."

"You choose ruin."

"Perhaps not. This month is drawing to a close, and we expect Antonio in the first fortnight of next month."

"You would make him believe . . . . ?"

"It is possible; no one suspects me; he will believe me. I am ready to do anything to save my little ones."

"Which means that instead of being killed by Antonio you will be killed by me; for, take note, I am not disposed to renounce either you or . . . . our child."

"Kill me? I am not afraid; I prefer that."

"Oh, Luisa, be good, be good; come with me, come with me!"

"Accept Peppino."

"No."

"Enough of words, Gabriele."

"What do you mean?"

"But few evenings remain to our love."

"Do you think I will let it all end like this?"

"Do not threaten me any more. I have decided."

"I, too, have decided, and to do something desperate."

He began to entreat again the next night, and for many nights afterwards. It was a constant change from supplication to menace, from the sweetest promises to the most atrocious threats, revelations of a vicious temperament mingled with boyish tenderness. Luisa was immovable, and her resistance grew easier now that she had, as it were, found herself again. She replied invariably in the monotonous tone that was the outcome of her obstinate idea:

"Take Peppino."

And Gabriele would grow exasperated and enraged.

"No, no! stop this. I want what belongs to me; that is what I want! I have said no! Must I persuade you with a knife in my hand?"

It was a curious mystery that, owing to her contemplation of the event which was about to happen, thinking of this little creature who was

the issue of a crime, Luisa began to lose interest in Gabriele. The mother took the place of the mistress blinded by passion, and became a reasoning being, who armed herself with coldness and became possessed of immovable seriousness which perhaps marked the first beginnings of disgust. Little by little physical fascination vanished and a catastrophe was in preparation which would be abrupt and decisive. This catastrophe would show Luisa the barrenness of that connection. Gabriele persisted in his refusal to accept Peppino, but this was almost a relief, for only thus could she find an excuse for depriving him of the other child. It was better to trust herself to Antonio, who, though a calculating egotist, was an honest man. Because, from that hour *when she knew,* whenever Gabriele spoke of riches or ambitious projects Luisa shuddered with indignation and terror which rose above the old indifference. Where the mistress had listened with indulgence, where the mistress had let things pass almost unnoticed, the mother judged herself and him remorselessly and pronounced a verdict of *guilty*, and in her thoughts distinctly, without restriction, called him . . . . a thief!

Thief! Yes, yes, let him refuse, let him go away at once, let him leave her free and alone immediately, free to confide herself to Antonio for the *atonement.*

She never doubted that she ought to expiate her sin ; on the contrary, she felt a kind of bitter joy in the thought of her punishment and was glad of

it. She would attain it by outrageous lying, but she would attain it, she was convinced. Had she not expiated minute by minute, as though her lips had absorbed, drop by drop, all the poison of a cup of bitterness, had she not expiated always, in every instant of her past? Such was her life; periods of ecstatic unconsciousness, and immediately succeeding periods in which she discounted both exaltation and unconsciousness. She would now expiate once more; she must save the little one, remove it from the influence of a thief.

Don Carlo Soave's predictions had not proved false; poverty had come, the curse had fallen; his daughter, Donna Luisa, had given herself to a thief, she had belonged to a smuggler, had Donna Luisa . . . . No! This he could not have expected, not even Don Carlo, with all his prophecies! Nor could the pious, silent Donna Anna have foreseen this when she let herself die in sadness and prayer.

Luisa had promised to visit Gabriele up to the eve of Antonio's return, and this night arrived. It was a scene never to be forgotten.

Gabriele received Luisa with the smile of a person who anticipates a struggle, that will, however, have a happy end. He approached her with that smile still on his lips, saying:

"If you are willing all is ready. I have arranged everything; we can leave immediately."

She was very weary and let herself fall heavily on the divan—her face was like that of a corpse, only her eyes were brilliant in their dark sockets.

"Marietta is in her death-agony," she said.

"What does that horrid, vindictive old woman matter to you?"

"I cannot abandon her in her last hours."

"I ask you for the last time, Luisa, will you come?"

"No, Gabriele."

"And why not?" and he began to swear brutally, his fists clenched, his eyes flaming, his face distorted with fury.

She turned upon him suddenly, undismayed thereat, and asked, "Why? Have you, then, changed your mind?"

"No."

"Will you change it?"

"No, by Heaven!"

"Neither will I."

"Take care!"

"I am not afraid of you, Gabriele."

He approached her brutally, as if intending some act of violence. Perhaps he meant to strike her. She did not stir, she let him seize her wrists and grip them hard without saying a word, only she grew still more intensely pale and her black eyes in their livid sockets shot forth savage gleams.

Then he suddenly became a supplicant—let go her wrists, and kissed her hands, apparently repentant; praying, imploring, repeating words of love, sitting beside her, enclosing her with loving arms, breaking into sobs, and bathing her neck and face with his tears. She remained immoveable, saying nothing, nothing at all. Then Gabriele

changed again, and appeared as though he consented and was resigned.

"Since you will not, it must be borne. It is a sign that you love me no longer, that you no longer care for me. You are tired of Gabriele, his kisses and caresses please you no more! And I who am going mad for you! But I shall be calm—you will see, I shall be calm. At least accept some money—look, just this; it will be useful to you. Do not despise it; let me at least be at rest on this point. I shall never see you again, but I wish to be assured that our little one wants nothing. You have no right to refuse—take it, take it."

Tenderly, as though choked by tears, he placed the bank-notes in her bosom, between her gown and her shawl. Luisa closed her eyes and shuddered—a thief's money! No, she would never use it.

He was tired of being gentle, and again flew into a rage.

"So you accept it! So you do not care! And you abandon me? You will let me die of desperation, longing for you, calling for you both? Then you should not have told me, you see. And do you think I will yield, will consent to this without playing the devil, without . . . ."

He shook her by the arms, exasperated by her silence, which made her seem immovable. He could have rent her, bitten her, torn her in pieces.

"Do you really want to be killed?"

He bent over her, close, close, with a face so

terrible, with eyes so dreadful, that she really thought she was lost and had but a few minutes more to live.

But she did not flinch, even with that certain expectation of death at her heart.

Then Gabriele laughed in a dreadful manner, sneering at her, abusing her in the most outrageous language. Then he seized her shoulders, pushed her in front of him to the door and dragged her downstairs. In the entrance hall he was overcome by a final fit of tenderness, and, embracing her, he kissed her furiously with kisses that were almost bites. At last, hurling at her yet one more terrible epithet, he pushed her out-of-doors.

She fled like an escaped prisoner. When she reached the house and her own room she felt that she had accomplished an odious task, the fruit of her guilt, that she had done for ever with Gabriele. What a relief! Suddenly she felt *that* money in her breast; going to the wardrobe, she opened the deepest drawer and threw in the banknotes, at the back, the very back. When she had closed the wardrobe again she breathed more freely. She could have cried.

That night Marietta died.

It was a torment, that preference shown by Antonio for the little Lucia; Luisa's torture now came thence, from that blind preference. All danger was over—Gabriele was gone for ever and Antonio believed in her; but that preference, it was an irony of fate, an insupportable torture.

Valenti, who had returned home penniless, bore

his mother's death with a resignation that perhaps arose from a secret sense of relief. There would be no more family quarrels; the attention Luisa had bestowed on Marietta, an attendance of which all spoke with genuine admiration and sincere enthusiasm, touched him—the birth of Lucia, a somewhat premature birth, it is true, after but seven months, and which had nearly cost Luisa her life, had made him very content. It appeared as though his travels had inspired him with the will to work and with love for his family, though it had rendered his character even harsher still with regard to all social relations.

He was more socialist than ever, after his manner of understanding socialism, because, at bottom, his theories very much resembled those of an ardent anarchist.

In invective, certainly, he was not wanting; of maledictions on the privileged classes he was not sparing. He did not care to contemplate a social revolution unless it came as a time of vengeance, a time of blood and massacre, dictated by an inexorable law of punition.

With the exception of Donna Anna, who had died like a saint, the *Castle people* were classified by Antonio Valenti by the most disparaging names. Nothing could stop his constant abuse of the Soaves, not even Luisa's perpetual silence, the most significant of remonstrances. Nothing—Don Carlo was a *malicious old man*, Donna Caterina a *degenerate creature*, Donna Lorenza a *being devoted to stupidity*.

Luisa, it is true, had abandoned them all, but she was still a Soave in the depths of her soul, and her heart bled at this abuse, it was torn by grief as though with pincers, and above all, when Antonio, thinking to do her honour, said :

" You do not even seem like a Soave ! "

Then, above all, she was hurt.

But all this faded before the derisive bitterness of that preference for Lucia. Antonio had her always about him, was ready to satisfy all the little caprices of the already imperious baby ; he gave her the tenderest names, calling her continually :

" Little bird of gold, father's treasure, star of Paradise."

When Lucia cried, saying that she wanted this thing, asking pettishly for that, Antonio would smile and say : " Just like her father ! She is my child all over, the little rogue."

Luisa was ready to faint with shame. Sometimes with a forced smile, she would say to her husband :

" That child has positively bewitched you ! "

Then he would retort :

" Is my wife jealous ? "

Luisa's face darkened.

" No, Antonio, but I am sorry for Peppino."

" I am fond of him too, poor child ! I love him too, but he is not so like me, you see."

Ah, Heaven ! Always this unconscious irony that plunged a dagger in her heart.

" You will spoil Lucia."

"And you, Peppino."

"Oh, Antonio, do be serious."

"Now you have begun to preach, Luisa; I avoid church on purpose not to hear the priest, and my wife takes up the part of the curate! Oh, wife, be quiet!" And he laughed long and loudly, tossing in his arms little Lucia, who clapped her hands excitedly.

"Peppino is pained by your preference."

"Peppino has an ugly nature; it is your business to correct him."

"It should be his father's."

"No, Signora, it is yours, you, to whom he is all the world; Peppino here, Peppino there, all day long."

"But . . . ."

"Yes, because he is a boy and you want to make something great of him."

"Antonio!"

"Luisa."

"You distress me."

"Oh, what a big word."

She felt as though she were suffocating. Going in search of the boy, she would press him to her heart, and beg his pardon in the humblest way, under her breath, in deserted corners, outside in the orchard, far away in the lonely silence of the country, so softly that not even the air knew what she said.

The boy, who adored his mother, grew up bold, tall, and strong. He resembled Luisa; she fairly worshipped him with a concentrated humility, an

ingenuous maternal admiration, while she often felt impelled to use inflexible severity towards Lucia who already had the eyes of a cold and magnificent woman. She watched her, almost spied on her, noticing the awakening, the smallest developments even, of that rebellious character, making comparison, finding resemblances, trembling and then assuring herself after of suspecting an innocent being, a pure little creature who had a right to all her tenderness.

And yet. . . . .

"I love Peppino too, but he is not so like me, you see." Poor Antonio. For this reason, when she looked at her husband, she felt, not a re-birth of love—for true love there had never been—nor a return of passion, but a sense that overpowered her whole soul with an ineffable weakness and a dissolving tenderness, and it was this which decided the last change in her, born of remorse.

It was a complete revulsion, which marked, not the progress in corruption, a decay of memories, but a new phase, a return, instead, to the ideas of her girlhood, a flood of old thoughts which swamped the newer ones, the good and limited ideas of bygone days, those which had entered into her blood with the first words spoken, suffocating the acquired ideas, annulling them and marking the last change in her character. The days that were spent thus seemed as though they avenged the past, destroying as they did without restriction every subversive theory and leaving

in her memory decisive, implacable, deeply-graven traces of the events that had occurred, the thoughts that had led to these irremediable consequences, these visible effects, as though placed there to mark an interminable path of remorse.

This last transformation began when Luisa discovered for the third time that she was a mother: a new dignity mingled with a hope of salvation which had both a mystical and an entirely material character. The thought that she might give birth to another girl was insupportable; it was a period of fear and prayer. At times during the day, Luisa, surprised by sudden anxiety, would leave her work half done and let herself be invaded by a flood of thoughts, remaining for hours lost in the contemplation of the future. Another girl? Antonio would probably love her less than Lucia, and other comparisons would arise, yet another irony, more odious than the first. If at least the Madonna would grant her a boy! If at least might be granted to her this difference between her own true children and . . . .

Her own true children? But was not Lucia equally hers? And had she not, perhaps, greater rights, being in a secret sense *hers only?* It did not appear so to her; very curiously she had come to consider the little girl as an intruder, she seemed to her a thing of Gabriele's, the personification of a hateful sin; she would always take care of her, but love her . . . . no, never. These unjust thoughts were suggested by an un-

reasoning logic, but Luisa's whole temperament was illogical. In every action, whether guided by good or evil impulses, she would always exceed measure; to define her with a word, she was always *excessive*.

She once more turned to prayer, praying with intense fervour, invoking the memory of Donna Anna when her face was transfigured by the sound of music or by long ascetic meditations. She went to hear mass every day, caused candles to be burnt for her in the church, erected in her bedroom a little altar to the Madonna, whose image was hardly visible, so smothered was it in flowers and little lamps.

Antonio noticed it all, but did not hinder her. In him, too, a transformation had taken place; he had grown tired, the man of the past reappeared but rarely and then only for short intervals; the apostle had utterly disappeared, leaving in his place a different man, who dreamed away his life in silent mediocrity.

He never reproved Luisa, who now worked but seldom, who forgot everything appertaining to the present and had returned to her habits of the past, moved by her fears of the future. He worked for both, without conviction and without love, because it pleased him thus to drown his enthusiasms and the anger he felt against the ills of the world which once burned in his brain and soul.

He had not the heart to scold Luisa, every reproof would have died on his lips when he looked at her. Each day that passed diminished

her beauty, marked a noticeable change, seemed to point a diminution of her attractions by a painful progress of hours and minutes. That splendid beauty was withering, passing away, had already become a memory. The black hair fell off in handfuls, was turning grey; the light of the eyes faded; the burning lips made for voluptuous kisses turned pale, shrivelled and dried up. Then the cheeks grew hollow and the tall figure bent as though vanquished.

Thus was transformed that glowing beauty Antonio had loved with the egotistic pride of proprietorship. No, he had not the heart to scold her, he could scold her no more.

She began to long for things impossible to obtain. She would fain have plucked flowers to pieces, touched silk, contemplated the stars, but she was ashamed to own this, and was consumed by unsatisfied desire. If she could but have talked with little Lorenza, could behold her weary, angelic face! If she could once more see her home, the beautiful, lordly dwelling! Talk to the servants, talk to the furniture, obtain forgiveness, if only from these things.

She wanted a boy. A plan, suggested by religious terror, now began to take shape in her thoughts. This plan defined itself and took the character of a promise, a vow, a sacrifice. If it were a boy she would make him a priest, she would make of him an instrument of grace and pardon, renouncing him, vowing him to the priesthood, offering him to God.

The exaltation which in Caterina took the form of burning desire for punishment, which in Lorenza lighted the mystic flame of self-atonement, invaded also the spirit of Luisa, who exaggerated all things. In her new ardour, as though it were not enough that she mortified herself, she extended her condemnation to another soul of which she had no right to dispose. To Caterina it had sufficed to slay, to Lorenza to forget herself. Luisa, in order to expiate, needed herself and another being, who was innocent.

It proved, indeed, to be a boy. She called him Vincenzo, that he might bear the name of a saint who had pity on children, in order that afterwards, even if he should know the truth, he might have pity on Lucia.

From his infancy Vincenzo was an ascetic; with gentle sadness he lent himself to the *rôle* of little saint which his mother imposed on him with kind but peremptory attentions; Luisa carried out her secret programme and Vincenzo docilely obeyed his mother. He had the melancholy temperament of a delicate boy, constrained to be quiet by the want of physical strength. He somewhat resembled his aunt Lorenza; he, too, had thin pale lips and light golden hair that curled round his little sad face. He would watch the other boys at play, closing his mouth with a serious air, without envy, almost with suffering. He had melancholy ways unsuited to his age; he would lay his head upon his arm, gazing into space, as though oppressed already by many thoughts.

Antonio had a great and paternal pity for him; he would take him in his arms as if he were something fragile, calling him *his philosopher*.

He would say to him at times: "Oh, little old man, my poor little old man! You do not seem like a son of mine, you are so frail and slender! No, you are not like me, nor like Peppino, nor even like Lucia. See here, Luisa, how could you give me a son so thin and delicate! He is like wax, a puff of wind would blow him away."

Luisa's heart was wrung; she looked at the boy, fearful lest God should take him away from her as a punishment. Then Vincenzo would smile at her, and she would make him promises, which always referred to things of the Church. She would make him a white dress for the procession; she would buy him a golden circlet to put on his head that he might represent St. John the Baptist; she would give him a basket that he might strew roses along the road, in church, and on the *piazza*.

"But what do you want to make of him? A priest?" asked Antonio who was listening.

"And why not?" answered Luisa, fearful that her face would betray her.

"Oh, I don't care! Do as you like. Priest or soldier, no matter which, so long as you make an honest man of him! With the health he has, poor little old man, he will never be any good in the fields."

"That is what I say."

"Certainly. Do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think that if my mother, rest her soul, had been alive, she would have been pleased with you."

"You think so?"

"Imagine, at one time she wanted me to be a priest! She proposed it seriously. Lord, what an idea! She was glad afterwards that she had not succeeded when she saw me making love to all the girls in the place. Just think what a big sin you would have made me commit, Luisa, if I had become a priest and had met you afterwards!"

"Antonio, hush!"

"Why, where's the harm?"

"Lucia is listening to us."

In fact, that child was always about, listening, always about them, silent, with wide-open eyes and attentive ears. No one ever heard her come; she would approach swiftly and noiselessly, like a cat, and slip away like a lizard. She had the cunning silence of a little spy, eyes sharp and ready like a thief's, eyes which gleamed at the sight of objects and looked icily on people. She was the true daughter of Gabriele! She beat Peppino, who was three years her elder; nay, she did more than beat him, she hurt him cruelly, intentionally, pinching him, pulling out locks of his hair, scratching him, digging into his flesh with her sharp nails, that seemed poisoned. Peppino despised her a little, with the pride of the male who can avenge himself and will not. But for Vincenzo, Lucia felt a real hatred, a

hatred born of jealousy; he had come to rob her of so many caresses, she detested him. When she was alone with the child and no one could see her, she derided him for his weakness. If Peppino appeared at such moments there would occur an impressive little scene. Peppino idolised Vincenzo; he would grow fierce in order to defend him; his anger was like his father's, furious and honest. He would throw Lucia on the ground and hold her there, forcing her to ask pardon. She would refuse, calling him ugly names, with hoarse, tearless sobs of savage, concentrated fury; she was like a wild beast caught in a snare, a caged creature struggling in its weakness.

When she was offered anything Lucia neither answered nor accepted; she would take the gift and carry it straight away hurriedly with covetous action, fearing lest repentance might frustrate the giver's generous intention. If she was given fruit she hid it in some unknown corner till it accumulated; then she would go and look at it, lamenting it if decayed. She ate nothing but stolen fruit; she liked that best. She liked difficult conquests, even dangerous ones; she shook the peach-trees with the vigour of a boy, and climbed into the boughs as nimbly as a squirrel.

She was not affectionate; she was fond of Antonio because he spoiled her; she had sudden fits of tenderness for Luisa when she found her alone. If Vincenzo was near, or if Luisa was talking to Peppino, the little girl turned her

head the other way as though in despair, and would not look.

She asked her mother in a choking voice:

"Why do you not love me only?"

Nor was her tenderness of a childish kind, it seemed rather that of a passionate woman; her caresses were sweet, her kisses lingering, as though the handsome Gabriele had transmitted them into her blood. Luisa would shiver and try to send the little one away, persuading her to be moderate, to be quieter.

Lucia would then be taken with little convulsive attacks, making scenes, such as did not suit her age. Involuntarily the mother made comparisons, remembering the resemblance to Gabriele, which each day became more manifest, a moral resemblance that caused her to suffer more than if it had been a physical likeness, though that would have been much more dangerous.

Luisa had never dared to touch Gabriele's money in order to satisfy Lucia's caprices. It seemed to her that there was a great mortfication in making the child depend entirely upon Valenti. It was accursed money that! But when it came to be a question of sending Vincenzo to the Seminary, Luisa thought she could sanctify part of this money by using it for the person who was to be the intermediary of grace. To Valenti she spoke of wonderful savings, she made him think that the parish priest had helped her. He asked no further questions.

Vincenzo and Lorenza prayed, Luisa repented.

Would punishment be averted? Must it take its course?

Ah, me, what stations of suffering! How many, how many more before reaching the last? What endless grief before the evening came, the evening on which . . . .

In Luisa's memory these awful recollections succeeded thus. Antonio had an outburst of his old ideas, the last, which drew him into taking part in the riot and inciting the strike at the Soave furnaces. It had been a bad year, a year of hardship, and Antonio had acted through hatred of Caterina. Then came the murder committed by Caterina, the trial, and her acquittal. Then Lorenza's fall, followed by her sacrifice, the fall which resulted in the departure of the poor girl.

Thus they followed each other, a death, a murder, a desertion, a man of whom they had heard nothing more, perhaps another death.

Then a long period of fear.

Most dominant, during this long period, was the fear awakened by Lucia.

How beautiful was Gabriele's daughter! How beautiful had grown the living proof of that distant, yet unforgotten, sin! Gabriele's daughter, yes. Yet how distinct in the revelation of that savage character were the two impressions, how clearly could be discerned in various tendencies the mark of the mother as well! Ah, no, Luisa could no longer deceive herself; she and Gabriele lived in their offspring as though they had inoculated it with

their evil qualities only, with all their bad qualities. It seemed as though they had decided to live again in Lucia, to pass into her blood, to leave her as an inheritance the instincts which had made of the one a creature of impulse, of the other a criminal, with intervals of transitory passion. And with the progress of years it seemed as though the paternal legacy disappeared to a certain extent to give place to a greater resemblance to the mother's character. The passion for accumulating and hiding, the desire after small acts of revenge nourished in patient silence, the tendency to petty thefts, to cruelty towards the weak—all this gave place to a desire to please.

It was a longing which knew no rest, and which would most certainly not stop at playful conflicts of innocent coquetry; it was a longing which kept her continually preoccupied with her own person and with every kind of ornament. She wished to please every one without distinction, whilst always nourishing the thought of a final choice in which beauty and strength should predominate.

No spiritual thoughts ever troubled her. Lucia seemed devoid of soul, and no one could reproach her for the lack of it. Those two who had brought her into the world had endowed her with a beautiful body only, and an evilly-disposed brain. She tended her person with great complacency, and occupied her mind with barren projects. She was a curious type, a cross between a peasant and a lady, such as pleased Antonio. When better times came, after the death of Don Carlo, he made her

study a little, but he wished her to *remain a Valenti*, and thus it was that Lucia remained, also materially, the natural result of that guilty passion whose traces seemed to obey a fatal law.

They still remained at the *fattora* of the Roveres, as Antonio had insisted on doing so, because Antonio, as he grew older, retained nothing of his former character. He was no longer even weary, only apathetic; the smallest change exasperated him.

Peppino, of only mediocre intelligence, was, nevertheless, persistently energetic in his work. He was the one who provided for all, a robust man of simple tastes, devoid of ideas, of absolutely primitive principles—principles which made him inexorable in uprightness. He had a frank contempt for Lucia, which alarmed Luisa. With regard to that, however, even Antonio would rouse himself to complain of Lucia. Turning to his wife he would say with a sigh:

"I am afraid that girl is going to be a good-for-nothing. You were right, Luisa, I spoiled her too much. I don't understand, though, neither my mother nor you . . . . there never were any light women in Casa Valenti. You keep watch over her?"

"Always."

"And . . . . what do you think?"

"Well, so far."

"Perhaps we are wrong to be alarmed."

"God grant it!"

"What a beautiful creature, though!"

"Too beautiful."

Too beautiful, in truth.

When Vincenzo came home for the vacations Luisa had some hopes. The young priest had so gentle, so convincing a way of speaking! If Lucia had only listened to him! But no sooner did Vincenzo approach a religious topic, such as the perils of the world, or the vanity of earthly things, than Lucia either went out or listened with lips tightly closed, and with an evil expression on her face and a look of ironical wonder in her eyes, which seemed to swim in a marvellous flood of azure. The young priest, who knew not the tortures of temptation, would grow excited, his eyes seemed dazed in an ascetic wave, his face, feminine in its sweetness, was transfigured, his long, thin hands shook in gesticulation as if from suppressed emotion, all his slender body in its fluttering black habit trembled.

"A saint!" thought Antonio.

"A saint!" whispered the mother, mentally thanking God.

Instead, he was an unconscious and pious victim, a sacrifice who consumed himself in prayer, a splendid intelligence imprisoned in the fetters of dogma.

"Do you hear him, Lucia?"

"Lucia, did you hear?"

Antonio and Luisa would ask.

"I heard. Well, and what of it?"

"How, what of it?"

"Such sermons are all very well in convents."

"They suit you very well, you brazen girl!"

"I don't want to be a nun."

"Who proposed any such thing, my sister?"

"I do not intend to be killed by savages, I can tell you."

"But, Lucia . . . ."

"I am not in the least like my Aunt Lorenza, and, besides, she was old, and it would have been difficult for her to marry; that is the secret of her vocation."

"Lucia!"

"I know what I say."

"What? Speak up! What?"

"That certain tales do very well for children, but not for a girl like me."

"Lucia!"

"Oh, excuse me! I am young, I want to amuse myself; preaching bores me."

"Take care what you do, sister."

"Be easy, Vincenzo, be sure I will take care."

And she laughed loudly.

"You mean . . . . ?"

"I mean . . . . nothing."

"A fine answer!" said Peppino ironically.

"If you want another, here's one: you have the fields, Vincenzo has his rosary, and I have my plans."

"Nice plans!"

"They are well worth yours, it's only a question of taste. Vincenzo does not care for girls; now, I like young men very much."

The young priest blushed, Luisa was indig-

nant, Peppino smiled scornfully, and Antonio was furious.

The girl let the hurricane sweep over her without a tremor; at last she asked:

"Have you done?"

And then:

"Now I can go."

And she went off indifferently, leaving them in consternation, all four of them.

The affair remained a secret until the last moment. Nothing, nothing, there had been nothing in Lucia that could cause them to divine or to awaken suspicion. Nothing, not a word, not an indication, not the least excitement.

Nothing for the mother who yet feared and watched; nor for Antonio, who doubted and then accused himself for doubting; nor for Peppino, who instinctively distrusted his sister; nor for Vincenzo, who seemed to have an intuition of sin in others. So impassible was Lucia's face, so profound her dissimulation, that it had become her second nature, a tranquil, unalterable, natural perverseness, the outcome of one who had been led astray, and of one who was degenerate.

She, too, like her mother, had stooped, but she had gone still lower—to the very dregs. Not with the desire to dominate as sovereign—ah, no, not in the least; but from instinctive love of vulgarity. And on this account, when Anselmo showed himself more common than usual, rougher, more brutal

in his jealousy, she had curious thrills of pleasure. It was she who excited him ; it pleased her to see him angry, to hear his threats, to see his face darken with suspicion. When he grasped her wrists so tightly that red rings remained impressed on them like bracelets of blood, Lucia laughed convulsively in short gasps ; it pleased her to laugh like that. She teased him, plagued him, excited him, made him suffer the torments of the damned, inventing the most exaggerated stories of absurd fancies in order to cause him suffering. That was Lucia's delight ; she measured love by pain and anger. She knew well that he adored her to desperation ; when she saw him furious she felt more sure of him. Instead of frightening her it calmed her nerves and soothed them. Such was her love, a whirlwind of the senses and perverse caprice.

Anselmo Agostini was a very Hercules, of a robust and perfect beauty. In the village he was called *The Giant.* They were all afraid of him ; he consorted with the worst young ruffians, spent many hours at the tavern, was violent and quarrelsome, and was said to have "love in his blood." In fact, when Lucia tormented him, he had a supplicating way, the prayer of a brutal Colossus.

"Stop ! Get along now, stop that. I shall end by crushing you to bits ; I see blood."

Then she would answer with provocative smiles :

"You see blood ? I like blood-colour."

He was a pedlar ; she would go to meet him at a distance in the neighbouring villages, would

travel miles and miles along the road to be like him, and because she liked that sort of vagabondism. She went through the woods, by the narrow paths, skirted the fields, glided alongside the hedges, strained her eyes to look for him coming, with his box on his broad shoulders. She was afraid of nothing; she pushed aside the long trails of bramble and thorny branches without taking any care of her hands, which were scratched and bleeding; she threw stones at the snakes, leaped ditches, or sprang boldly into them, not caring if the water reached her knee; there was something of the gipsy in her.

When he saw her coming to meet him with her adventurous smile, he felt his heart palpitate with savage pride, but she soon found means to poison his joy.

They plunged into the depths of the woods; he watched her as she walked in front of him, with movement which reminded him now of a cat, now of a serpent. They halted amongst the pines, where she would raise her beautiful face, inhaling the resinous odour with dilated nostrils. Or she opened his packs of merchandise, trying the many-coloured handkerchiefs on her head and round her neck, putting on a whole shopful of sham jewellery, making the glassy sheen of mock diamonds and the pale red of false rubies glitter in the sun. Or she would throw herself on the grass, face downwards, when her shoulders and all her beautiful body looked terribly seductive. She would watch in the bushes the movements of

small living things—shining beetles, and other small bright creatures, piercing them with pins, cruelly, swiftly, surely.

And all the while she talked, saying things both true and false, things that aroused a desire to kill her.

"This morning, when crossing the piazza, I saw . . . ."

Here she would pause.

"Saw whom?"

"The druggist Carlino."

"Ah; did he speak to you?"

"Yes."

"What did he say? Tell me!"

"Don't be in such a hurry."

"Tell me, will you?"

"I tell you not to be in a hurry."

"Ah, by . . . . !"

"He talked nonsense; he called me *Rosebud.* There, is that enough for you?"

"And you?"

"I? That's pretty! I, what?"

"You won't make me believe you said nothing."

"Oh, certainly I did!"

"Flirt! You answered him?"

"I answered him, 'You are a stupid!' Do you like that? And now I say the same to you."

Then Anselmo would give a sigh of relief and bend over her to kiss her neck, saying:

"You infamous thing! You'll drive me mad."

And he laughed at himself.

But she, who had only one pin for the insects

which she transfixed with such cruel skill, had a whole armoury of daggers and poniards for the heart of her lover.

"You are wrong to be jealous of Carlino; I don't care for him, he has ears like a donkey."

"You like me better, don't you? Say, Lucia?"

"You? Let's see, I'll tell you. I am fond of you, but . . . ."

"But . . . . what sort of a 'but' is this?"

"But, I like Emilio Guzzetti better."

"Ah, wretch!"

"For that matter, he makes eyes at me too."

"The dog! I'll beat him half to death!"

"Oh, my dear fellow, if you were to beat all the boys who look at me!"

"So it pleases you—eh?"

"I don't say no."

"Stop talking about it."

"You ask questions, I answer you."

"Then you like it?"

"Yes, I like it."

"I shall end by stabbing you."

This was what he always said. The knife, it seemed, was to liberate Anselmo; he made these ferocious promises to her as if to calm himself. She was not at all impressed; she would laugh, or she would begin to sing, lying on the turf, resting her head on her arms, that made a white arch round her black hair, her face turned to the blue sky and her eyes gazing into the space above her. Anselmo listened to the simple love-songs that she sang so artlessly with a voice that was less cold in singing,

but nevertheless recalled her somewhat harsh tones. He watched her rosy mouth, her white, palpitating throat, he felt as though he could have stifled her with caresses, suffocated her in an embrace. She intuitively felt the danger, but it amused her, and audaciously she launched into the air the notes of her gipsy song.

Suddenly she rose, resuming her ramble through the wood, amongst the young trees, the thorny plants and brambles, liking to feel her dress caught by them, to feel herself dragged back, as it were, by these impediments.

She would say:

"Even the thorns, too, desire me, the bushes want to hold me back, to make love to me."

And Anselmo would answer:

"It is you, Lucia, who are a big thorn that has transfixed itself in my heart."

"Then take the big thorn out of your heart, the big thorn will go and pierce some one else."

"I cannot, I cannot!"

"Try."

"Witch that you are, you know well that I cannot!"

"I know it, I know it."

"And that is why it amuses you to torment the man who loves you. Ah, witch, witch!"

"The big thorn wants to pierce deeper and deeper and deeper."

"It cannot go deeper than it has gone."

"We shall see."

"Do you want to kill me?"

"Who knows!"

"It is rather I who will kill you, from jealousy, if you betray me."

"We shall see, we shall see."

"Do you mean to betray me?"

"Who knows! Who knows!"

"Oh, infamous witch, are you at it again!"

In this wise there were constant renewals of love, jealousy, provocation, ceaseless renewals of insults and caresses, a great tormenting passion.

There were moments when Anselmo felt tempted to make an end of it all—once and for ever to withdraw himself from this witchery. He had already caused so much pain to his poor old mother, the only being who loved him, the extent of whose forgiveness was endless—was he, perhaps, to go to the galleys for the sake of a woman who did not love him? But here Anselmo was in error; if she had not loved him, why should the strange girl have given herself to him, trusted in him, risked everything for him? To meet him, to see him, she overcame every difficulty, broke through all obstacles. They both of them knew that they were in continual danger, for Antonio and Peppino were not men to be played with; but the most audacious, the boldest, by force of indifference, was Lucia.

And to what purpose, if she had not loved him?

Thus the chain was refastened, the nail driven yet deeper in.

There came a day when Anselmo saw that which

gave him a right to be jealous. It seemed to him that he heard certain words, and had experienced in consequence a great and unexpected shock, because since some little time the cunning girl had ceased to torment him with lies. This meant, then, that Lucia could only find words to invent tales; truth made her silent, her powers of invention fell short when there was really something to hide. But she was not less assiduous with Anselmo; she was as attentive as before, she ceased to torment him with imaginary stories, and seemed to have grown almost affectionate.

Anselmo had the patience to wait. Winter came, and henceforth there were no more walks in the meadows, no more meetings in shady paths, no more love-making in woods, which now looked like a mass of black skeletons. They exchanged sly looks in church, met in the barns and in deserted huts scattered among the naked fields; they passed long hours in these fragile buildings, hearing the rain beat down on the wooden roofs covered with straw, or watching the snow falling through the open door. The cold penetrated inside, they could hear the long-drawn lament of the wind, it seemed as if they were lost in the silence—"the world forgetting, by the world forgot."

Luisa put no hindrances in her way and raised no objection to her long absences. The three Soave girls had been accustomed to enjoy liberal permission to go out in all weathers, so it seemed natural to her, and Lucia had always shown a preference for tempest over calm, for rainy days

over sunny ones. Further, there were matrimonial projects in the air; there was an excellent match in view—Lucia had been spoken to and had shown herself inclined for it. How pleased the mother was, she even began to hope once more!

But Anselmo, who had such patience in waiting, now knew with certainty.

It was a Sunday, after Christmas. The young man was waiting for Lucia at the turn of the road that led to the *fattoria* of the Roveres. When he saw her he went up to her carelessly, as though he had not come there on purpose but found himself by chance obliged to greet her. The girl frowned; Anselmo had never before been so near to the home of his sweetheart.

"Signora Lucietta."

"What is it you want?"

"I must speak to you."

"Not here, surely."

"Of course not; come this evening to the Guzzetti's little barn, the one that marks the short cut to Roccalta."

"I'll be there after church. Have you anything nice to tell me?"

"Something very nice," replied Anselmo in a quivering voice.

She did not notice the strange tones in which he spoke, and, smiling, would have passed on, but he detained her a moment, asking:

"And you, have you nothing to say to me?"

"I? No, indeed."

"No?"

" Why no. You're a fine sort of a fellow, truly ! Good-bye till to-night ; but mind, I can't stay long, Vincenzo is here until Epiphany, and then there are always sermons."

" Very well—all right. Till to-night, then."

" Good-bye, cat."

" Good-bye, snake."

After supper Lucia went to dress for church. When she came back into the kitchen, her beautiful face framed by a dark shawl, Antonio instantly asked :

" You are not going to church alone, are you ? "

" No, father ; mother's coming later with Rosetta ; I'm going on with Mariannina."

" But come home with mother, I beg," said Antonio, who sat crouching in the ingle-nook.

" All right, I'll come back with mother," replied Lucia, opening the door and disappearing.

She traversed the courtyard. It was snowing ; she passed on lightly, a black shadow on the white carpet, to call Mariannina, who was just ready. The two girls went into church together. It was full of incense, and in the church stood many people who all took part in the drama that was about to be enacted ; people who had been present at the prologue, others who were to take part in the action, others, again, who were supernumeraries, and some who were characters in the epilogue. In the Casa Soave pew sat Donna Caterina, looking straight at the altar. People always observed her with wonder, almost with terror. Beside her stood Rinaldo, a slender, melancholy youth. Next to it

was the Rosalba pew, it was empty; then, further on, that of the Mariani's, empty also. In the centre of the church, amidst the crowd of women, stood Luisa, with bent head, thinking of Vincenzo, who was praying at the altar with the other priests. Amongst the group of young girls stood Lucia, looking about her with cold, bright eyes; Mariannina stood beside her, absorbed in prayer; she did not trouble Lucia, who turned for an instant towards the right-hand side of the nave, the men's side, which was fuller than usual, as the male members of the population were all at home for Christmas. The girl made an almost imperceptible sign of intelligence to Anselmo, who was leaning against a pillar. He replied by another imperceptible gesture, which she alone perceived. Turning her head towards the altar, Lucia looked at another young man and cast down her eyes, the young man also lowered his eyelids and looked down.

It was impossible that Antonio should have seen, nor did he; but it was as if he saw—he started, and trembled violently.

The church was odorous with incense, full of harmony, ringing with the notes of the organ.

When Mariannina, crossing herself for the last time, turned round in search of her companion, Lucia had disappeared. Lucia was already at the barn, waiting for Anselmo. The snow was falling thick and fast, shimmering white in the darkness, and the cold was intense. She waited a few minutes before Anselmo came. He greeted her in a hoarse voice, embraced her, and kissed her on the

mouth repeatedly, then clasped her with one long, lingering kiss.

And the snow continued to fall fast, thick, white, ceaselessly, in the silence and darkness.

"You had all this to tell me?" she asked at last, drawing herself away.

"Oh, Lucia!"

"But it is the usual thing," she said ironically.

"Are you tired of the *usual thing?*"

"I? No. Why?"

They were silent in the infinite silence and darkness.

"Let me kiss you again!" implored the young man.

"Kiss me, if you like," replied Lucia calmly, presenting her lips with indifference.

As he kissed her wildly, like one who is desperate, she asked:

"What is the matter with you?"

"Is it true that you are going to be married?"

"I know nothing of it."

"You would consent?"

"Well, it's just possible," she replied cynically, "I might be in danger of doing it."

"You would be in great danger," he said gloomily.

Lucia did not understand; she shrugged her shoulders.

"I am going home."

"But are you not afraid?"

"Of whom?"

"Of me."

"And why should I be afraid of you?"

"Because you are betraying me!"

"You make me laugh."

'What do you mean?"

"What I say—you make me laugh."

"Then you really want that stab?"

"Don't make me laugh so, Anselmo!"

"Who will laugh last, Lucia?"

"I shall."

"Are you quite sure?"

"Yes, because you will convince yourself that you are mistaken."

"Will you tell me that you love me still?"

"Get along, stupid! If I hadn't loved you I shouldn't have come to you. Why am I here this evening—tell me that?"

Anselmo had a gleam of hope; ah, yes, why should she have come?

She gave him another kiss.

"Good night, bear," she said, turning away.

"Snake, good night," replied Anselmo, almost cheerfully.

She ran off at full speed. He never followed her—that was understood; but that evening he could not help himself, he went after her with the step of a spy. Heavens! What a hurry Lucia was in! And where was she turning to now? Not going home? Oh, God! oh, God! Down the little road that led straight to the shrine of the Madonna; at the end of that road stood *the other man* awaiting her. Anselmo seemed to see his face as plainly as if it had been day. Now he did not care whether he was seen or not, he only cared to reach Lucia.

She, terrified, divining all, ran straight into perdition, in the hope of reaching *the other man* and of being defended.

Instead, Anselmo caught her just in front of the shrine, and the blood-red light of the lamp suspended before the sacred image fell on them both.

He sprang at her with one bound, and, stabbing her with his knife, merely said:

"So this is the way you go home, is it? Take that?"

Luisa, returning home, found Antonio preparing to light the lamp to go to bed.

"Where is Lucia?" asked the old man.

"I thought she had come home before me. She must have stayed with Mariannina, or she will come on with Peppino and Don Vincenzo." *

"Well, good-night, Luisa."

"Good-night, my old man."

Left alone, Luisa mended and blew up the fire. Curiously enough, she felt her soul at peace that evening, as though she were filled with a beneficent sense of rest. She sat down by the fire to await the return of her children. Vincenzo, what a comfort he was! And Peppino, such a handsome young man—so serious, so respectful! And how obedient he was besides, attending church and staying at home nearly every evening.

Lucia, too, was perhaps not as bad as they thought her; it seemed she was improving, that

* Priests bear the title of Don by courtesy.

she had decided to accept the future they had chosen for her. Ah, if she only would!

The door was opened violently; Luisa started.

"Who's that?" she called, turning round. But she had hardly caught sight of Peppino than she rushed to meet him, so terribly changed was his face.

"My God! what has happened to you?"

He looked round.

"Where is Lucia?" he asked.

"Lucia? With Vincenzo, I believe; she must have gone into the sacristy, and be waiting there."

"Ah, no, mother, no!"

"But what is there to be scared at? She may be at Mariannina's."

Peppino did not wait for her to finish, but rushed out and knocked at Rosetta's door. A rapid dialogue ensued.

"Who's there?" asked the peasant woman from within.

"I, Peppino; has your daughter come back?"

"She has."

"Alone?"

"Yes, alone."

"Oh, God in heaven!" cried Peppino, turning from the door and re-entering his own home.

"Well?" asked Luisa, in agonised tones, as he reappeared.

"Well, she's not there, not there, and I knew well she could not be. They have told me the truth, you understand? The truth, and I—stupid beast—would not believe it!"

"What is it, what is it you would not believe?"

"Some one stopped me in the street just now, some one who is well informed, who knows all the particulars, some one who wants to be revenged, you understand?"

"Oh, speak, tell me what you mean?"

Peppino stopped in front of Luisa, all trembling, and said:

"Oh, mother, we have done wrong; we should have looked after her better, should never have left her—never!"

"Lucia . . . ."

"Is the mistress of Anselmo Agostini."

"No!"

"Yes, yes, it is true! She has come to that! And we would have married her to an honest man! The mistress of Anselmo Agostini! And that is not all, is not all; he is not the only one."

"Oh God! oh God!" murmured Luisa, thunderstruck.

"It seems she has another as well—she has both of them; perhaps she is afraid, she deceives them both; perhaps she is afraid of Anselmo, who is capable of killing her."

"For mercy's sake, Peppino!"

"I shall do something desperate, I know I shall, mother!"

"Oh, remember that she is your sister."

"I shall beat her like a dog; but one of those two must be got rid of, one or the other."

He took down his gun from the rack.

"For your mother's sake, Peppino, do not go out!" implored the wretched woman in a choking voice.

"Let go! Somebody must pay," cried Peppino, furiously, going towards the door.

"What is the matter?" called old Antonio's voice, from above.

At this moment the door opened, and Vincenzo's ascetic figure appeared; he caught the meaning of the scene at a glance—saw his mother with clasped hands, Peppino with his gun, ready to go out, understood his father's question. Instinctively he guessed the truth.

"It's nothing, father," he said, raising his voice.

This voice, so respected, calmed Antonio immediately.

"Is it you, Don Vincenzo?"

"It is I, father."

"Ah, that's right. Good-night."

The young priest turned to his brother, who had paused, perplexed. His face grew majestic and severe; he advanced a few steps, and said in a low tone:

"For shame! Obey your mother."

"But . . . ."

"For shame, I say! Give me the gun."

"Don Vincenzo . . . ."

"The gun, directly!" imposed the ascetic, with the energy of his apostolic mission.

Peppino let the gun be taken from him like a child.

"And now," added the priest, in a gentler voice, "ask mother's forgiveness."

She held out her arms anxiously, her lips quivering with sobs, and her eyes veiled with tears, ready

to meet her favourite child half-way. Peppino threw himself into her arms, as if to escape from the sight of a crime.

Don Vincenzo contemplated the group calmly.

"I should like to know . . . ." he said.

Then Luisa dropped into a chair, and the tears flowed freely over her distressed countenance. Peppino told his brother all he knew.

"We must wait, must forgive; we may find a remedy with the help of God!" concluded the priest, whose heart bled all the same.

"She will listen to you," said Peppino, whose face was convulsed with grief.

Don Vincenzo went to take a book, drew near to the table, and prepared to pray. Peppino sat down silently by the door. Luisa looked at her son, who had renounced his vengeance; at her other son, who, disposing himself to pardon, had still the strength to pray whilst waiting. She felt both pride and tenderness. But the thought of the absent one was stronger than tenderness or pride, and a terrible quarter of an hour began. They only waited a quarter of an hour, while Vincenzo found courage in letting his soul wander amidst the consolations of religious meditation, while Peppino, materially subdued, awaited with certainty the calamity that was approaching. Luisa had fifteen minutes of a horrible vision.

Fifteen minutes of a horrible vision: looking into the fire, as though attracted by the leaping flame, gazing at the living red flame that was expiring.

It was her reason that was dying, and she felt it slowly die as the prayer proceeded.

She was alone in the solitary house, too rebellious to be loved by her gentle mother, too rebellious to be loved by her imperious father. She beheld once more her father and Caterina, who silently understood each other, who loved each other like the mirror and its reflection; she saw her mother, sweet and quiet, with Lorenza on her knees, or seated at the piano. Donna Anna played classical music. And how was it that delicate harmonies now floated around Luisa? Beethoven, Schumann, *that* music. Ah, God! Luisa thought she had completely forgotten it! But no, no, it was her mother who was playing, softly, softly, a well-known romance of Schumann's. Then her mother sang, too, softly, softly, sad songs in English. How sad the garden looked through the closed glass doors, how deserted was the meadow beyond! Once more Schumann, sad and obscure. Vague chords, lost notes, notes found again in this extreme agony. The wisteria trailed over the old balcony; Donna Caterina came out, dressed all in black, Donna Luisa was reading in the library a confused medley of old books, classical books, or books of mediocre worth.

That church nave and Antonio's eyes, the stony little lane, the low garden-wall, the rosy flush of the blossoming peach-tree, at last the kiss on her mouth, the flight . . . .

The black habit of the young priest brushed

against Luisa. Vincenzo stepped into the court-yard to look out. She turned round and fixed her eyes on the door. There was no one. Vincenzo once more returned to his prayers. Again Luisa's wild eyes turned to the contemplation of the blood-red flame.

. . . . The flight. Marietta. Implacable Marietta. Why did Antonio go away? How many faces passed before her in procession through the leaping flame? A face full of inexpressible grief and resignation, a waxen face. . . . . Sister Maria Regina, once Donna Lorenza Soave. Was she still alive? The face of him who had been Lodovico Rosalba; he kept his eyes closed; he must have a small, bloody hole in the back of his neck; his neck must be pierced by a revolver-bullet. Donna Caterina had killed him out of jealousy, so that he might pass into eternal life in the midst of his mortal sin. Horrible! The assizes, the interrogation, the defence. Lorenza, who loved Gustavo.

Once more the sad, mystic refrain from Schumann.

. . . . The deposition, the defence, the acquittal. And Gustavo, who no longer would have Lorenza. Then *Donna Luisa*, no, simply *Luisa*, went to entreat of her who had slain a man. But the murderess said: "*No, no, expiation is not death. Pardon is a weakness. Memory is stronger than the passing moment.*"

Those words were spoken by Donna Caterina, and then Donna Luisa—no, Luisa, just simply Luisa —fled in desperation. And the sky was red, burning with the sunset; the country was all red. Was it burning? Was it on fire?

When did that happen? When? *Before* or *after?*

Donna Anna sang too, softly, softly, in a weak voice, sad songs in English.

"Donna Luisa! . . . ." Who called her thus once again, in the vision? No one ever called her so now! It was Gabriele. Gabriele's eyes tempted her; she was obliged to go to him, *obliged to.* "*Enough to burn up your heart, too.*"

"*Do not say no again, if you do not wish me to kiss this mouth, which is killing me.*"

Gabriele's love had kindled, had burnt up her senses; and the mouth he had kissed so oft, so oft . . . .

The wisteria grew all round the antique balcony; Donna Caterina came out there, dressed all in black.

"*Something in the blood. It's true I am a bastard. If I met my mother I should laugh in her face.*"

Oh, horror, horror! A thief, a smuggler! He resembled—no, not Lucia, the same character. She and Gabriele had created that pretty monster of perversity. Vincenzo was their salvation. And

Peppino, he was adored. But it was Vincenzo who must save her.

The waxen face of Sister Maria Regina, who had been Donna Lorenza Soave. Was she still alive ?

Salvation was impossible, impossible, because she had not yet confessed ; yes, yes, that was why. She should have confessed at once ; instead, she had gone on lying, so many years !

Confession ! Confession !

This was why the prayers of Vincenzo and Lorenza availed nothing. God punished her because she had not *confessed.* And why had she not remedied everything immediately, telling Antonio all ? Should she confess all to the poor old man, who believed in her ?

Lodovico must have a small bloody hole in the back of his neck, his neck must be pierced with a revolver-ball. Donna Caterina had killed him, out of jealousy, so that he might pass into eternal life in the midst of his mortal sin. Horror ! Horror !

To *confess,* after so many years ? Why not ? There is always time for repentance ; it is never too late to implore forgiveness of God.

Don Vicenzo said the same. It was an obsession, a madness that caught her by the throat, a wild longing to humiliate herself, instantly, to cry out her own shame, humbling herself before her children, before her husband.

It was her reason in its death agony.

The refrain from Schumann, the rosy blossoms of the peach-tree, the wisteria, Gustavo would not have Lorenza, would not have her now. Gabriele was waiting ; he wanted to kill her, did Gabriele. Gabriele's daughter had a lover, had two. She was lost, was Gabriele's daughter.

She must *confess* immediately, at all costs. Immediately.

"Here she is," said Vincenzo. with a start. The mother rose to her feet and looked towards the door with scared eyes. Peppino rose too.

The young priest opened the door and stood at one side, as if to receive and admit her who had need of pardon. In the dark frame of the open door the heavy flakes of snow were seen, falling thickly, rapidly.

They had certainly heard the gate of the court-yard noisily closed. Was no one coming ? Ah yes, there she was. It was she, Lucia, staggering in, with dim eyes and bleeding neck. The young priest received her in his arms, while the mother uttered a cry of terror. He carried her carefully to a chair, and understanding that it was *the end*, said quickly, "Think of God" ; then turning to his brother he ordered him to "Go and call father." To Luisa he said, "Courage, mother," and once more he leaned over the wounded girl to speak to her of God.

"What has happened?" asked Vincenzo gently.

Lucia neither moved nor spoke.

"Do you forgive him?" asked Vincenzo.

Lucia opened her lips and said something, but they could not understand. Then she closed her mouth and did not move again.

Luisa gave a shriek when she saw Antonio burst into sobs over Lucia's body.

"No, Antonio, no! Do not weep, she is not your child, that one. She is not your child! Vincenzo and Peppino are your children."

The old man rose up to his full height, terrible to see, while Peppino drew back shocked.

"Yes, they are yours, but Lucia is Gabriele's daughter."

The old man approached her, an angry and threatening figure, ready to strike her. But the young priest sprang towards his mother, caught her in his arms, and dragging, almost carrying her away, cried out:

"Pardon, father, pardon! In God's name, father. And you, mother, be silent—oh, be silent!"

But Luisa continued to struggle in her son's arms and to accuse herself.

"Lucia is Gabriele's daughter—Gabriele's daughter!"

And she continued to scream, seized and overpowered by the madness of that desperate and useless confession.

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